BIRDS OF A FEATHER

MARCEL NADAUD

SHORT STORY COLLECTION

WINWARD PRESCOTT

Birds of a Feather

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By

Marcel Nadaud

Translated from the French by
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Ineffective because
the translator has tried to
French soldiers as
be too slangy & American slang
do not use
aptly. The translator has not
tried to translate the French slang
into English, but has attempted
to give it the semi-equivalent
i.e. merely the words which
of French soldiers might use
an American soldier
in the same conditions. The result
is not at all natural.

Story

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FOUR OF A KIND

I. R. G. A.

UNDER the pavilion of the Gare du Nord Papa Charles waited patiently for Chignole and Flagada, with whom he was to take the six-o'clock train for Plessis-Belleville. He had parted from them about midnight, after the Bassinets' dinner; a gay little dinner, at which M. Bassinet, slightly elevated, had proposed a number of rococo toasts to victory, to the soldiers "on the job," and especially to the aviators—"those heerroes!"—and Flagada had captured the assembly with several monologues in his best vein.

The ladies had not been so merry. Madame Bassinet bitterly bewailed her sauces, which disappointed her fastidious palate:

"But it is all your fault. A good dinner must not be kept waiting, and you were a full hour late."

"I have already told you, Ma'me Bassinet, that these children had their little special engagements. I know what it is to be young. Listen, gentlemen; I—yes, I——"; and M. Bassinet was in the middle of one of his raciest stories before a withering glance from his wife could warn him of Sophie's presence.

"Oh, little daughter, little daughter, do hurry up and get married! Then I shan't have to be forever twisting my tongue seven times over before I dare speak."

"But, Papa, is it I who make the delay? As far as I am concerned, it cannot be too soon. And—I think Chignole agrees with me."

Chignole did not answer, he closed his eyes, the better to commune with his soul, and bent his head in fervent acquiescence.

If the truth were told, he was a bit ashamed, and secretly reproached himself: "You have been outrageously silly, my poor Chignole, to let your head be turned till you forgot your own little Paris, Sophie, the good work-a-day life. Of course, it was the fault of that damnable climate of the Côte d'Azur, which goes to your head like a slow waltz or like one of Papa Charles's amber-tipped cigarettes. Yes; I confess; I was an ass. It is risky for a man to look on at such a fairy show as that; he wants to be somebody.—And because I dressed the part, I thought I was the hero. —Ah! such an idiot!"

No; Sophie was not to be compared to those women down there: those parasites, languidly parading their insatiable curiosity; those seaside belles; those bold-eyed women of Piedmont gathering tuberoses in the gardens of Cimiez. No; she was not at all complex, the little stenographer; but he knew her to be so loyal, so sincere, so devoted, so perfectly his own, that he could not but prefer her to those others.

"It is quite true, my children, I don't deny it; we might have taken advantage of Chignole's convalescent leave to celebrate your marriage, but *primo*, our ace has decided to cut it short in order to go back immediately with his chief, and *deucio*, we are at war. A conventional Paris wedding—how dull! I have therefore decided——" (M. Bassinet lifted an Olympian eyebrow and emptied his glass.) "You are never billeted on the firing-line; always some kilometres behind; so, the moment you are settled in your new quarters, we plan to arrive in the neighbouring town; and there, close to the front, as gay as you please, you shall be joined together. I have said it."

"And what if someone rings the concierge's bell while I am gone?"

"Ma'me Bassinet, we can pay for a substitute. What is the sense of putting away money for our funeral, these twenty years, if we may not nibble at it in honour of little daughter and her aviator?"

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Time dragged for Papa Charles. "They must have forgotten to wake them. Devil take it!—we shall come out of this with eight days' close arrest." Cool as a cucumber, his tall figure swinging along jauntily, he resumed his stroll on the platform.

"Hue Lolotte! Hue!" M. Bassinet, with a flourish of his whip, urged on Lolotte, who described an elegant arc and drew up at the curb.

"Here we are!" Chignole and Flagada hurtled through the carriage door.

"Don't forget that we hit the hay rather late, old man; it took a bit of coaxing to get us up this morning," said Chignole.

"Not to mention the fact that the ladies couldn't let their Chignole go till they had hugged him, all round. Over and over, I protested, 'You will spoil that boy!' but it was no use talking. They couldn't part from him.—Women, you understand——" M. Bassinet shrugged his shoulders, a gesture of disillusion, then:

"My aces, don't let me delay you. I won't

say 'Good luck'—that's a hoodoo; but I'll think it. You are off, eh? Get at their insides—as far as it'll go—for you, and for the old jackasses like me who can't do it. And Chignole, my boy, if ever you find yourself strapped, if you need a little chink, just drop me a line: 'Purse torpedoed.' I shall understand."

Arm in arm, the three friends entered the station. Chignole let his bag fall on the toes of a civilian, and the delicate little joke appealed to them all immensely.

M. Bassinet watched them disappear: "Poor lads! Brave lads!" With his coat cuff he tried to wipe away the tears that would come.

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Plessis-Belleville. They leave the station, turn their backs on the village, and follow the long road leading to the offices of the *Réserve Générale d'Aviation* (*R. G. A.*)

"It's agreed, Flagada? We don't separate? I was to pass on to a *Spad* with Chignole,

but I shall ask to stay on the *Voisin*. Really, you know, I do like my old cuckoo—we shall probably get our chance at night-flying."

Flagada stammered his thanks, but Papa Charles cut him short.

"You'd better let me pull that off with the Commandant. The stunt will be to make sure of the delivery of the busses, and get to the front before evening."

"Right-o!"

"And, I say, Flagada! don't load up here with an observer. We'll try to find one in the squadron who'll fit in with us."

"Somebody who can see a joke—what? I didn't go to war to be bored."

Rotary motors were detonating; stationary engines purring; the air reeked with the smell of burning oil; motor-cyclists, dispatch-bearers, raced toward the hangars; mechanics worked at the planes with the apparent carelessness which characterizes sustained activity. Near the shed, where the anemometers and weather-gauges were set up, a

group of pilots discussed the latest news by telephone from the meteorological stations.

After breakfast Papa Charles and Flagada submitted themselves to the many formalities of the organization. Chignole scrutinized the machines, detecting every possible flaw. He bound the piano wires near the propeller with twisted thread, so that if they snapped they should not get within the swing of its orbit and cause an accident. He regulated the indicators along the rim and set in the cockpit a box containing thirteen grains of salt—the mascot that never fails.

They're off! The engines revolve; Papa Charles, his hand on the gas throttle, listens carefully, then switches off. The purr of Flagada's machine sounds normal.

"Ready?"

"Well!"

Papa Charles signs to the mechanics to remove the blocks.

"One minute," cries Chignole, "there's the Commandant."

They wait for him, and he comes running:

"If you have to land en route, look out for jarring on bare ground. Two of your comrades were killed between Vauchamps and Champaubert. Careful, eh? Cut out the drinks."

"That's what we're here for, Sir."

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Two hundred metres. On the right, Paris, in a veil of tawny clouds. On the left, Ermenonville, the Isle of Poplars, the empty tomb of Jean-Jacques, and the willows that bewitched Corot. Farther off, Nanteuil, Villers-Cotterets, Soissons—the Boches.

"Flagada isn't half bad," said Chignole complacently, pointing to their friend who flew in their wake.

Meaux; they are following the Petit Morin. Papa Charles studies the route carefully.

"There it is."

"What?"

"Where they came a cropper."

In a meadow at the edge of the stream a shattered aeroplane made the sign of the cross.

"Wheels in air; a regular somersault! Engine topsy-turvy. They must have been green hands, those fellows."

The biplanes descended in a spiral to salute the dead bird, then rose again and flew for Vertus and Bar-le-Duc, where they were to learn their ultimate destination. Contrary to habit, Chignole and Papa Charles were silent. Their flight absorbed them, possessed them. As sailors feel the lure of the sea when they hear the booming of the great deep in the shrouds, at the crossing of the bar, so these two, once again free in space, were seized with passionate desire to ride the air. They longed to mount up forever, always higher, toward the light, in the enthralling dash of the machine.

II. FLAGADA REVEALS HIMSELF

"Oh, yes; we all know! You are aces and we are two-spots. Nobody denies it. But when it comes to night-flying—we're always at your service, *Messieurs les Chasseurs!*"

Although he had been in Bar-le-Duc hardly

more than fifteen minutes, Chignole had already contrived to stir up a dispute about the respective merits of battle planes and bombing planes. At the pilots' mess, before a noisy but sympathetic audience, he sang the praises of the biplane with the wide wing-span.

"I know; I know; you fly zebras and we, elephants. Just the same, Papa Charles and I are still willing to do our climbing in the old family 'bus. You saw? Papa Charles was a trifle close for landing; he cut off the juice, but the mill wouldn't stop. If we'd been on one of your planes that go slashing through the air like a razor, we should have been sliced off like a head of lettuce; while on ours we stood the shock as easily as a bird!"

"Pour him out a drink. Then he'll give you a rest from his airy romancing."

Enter Papa Charles with Flagada: "I have the orders. We *rendezvous* at Nancy, to-morrow."

"Our old crowd?"

"Perhaps; we shall see. We should worry. This evening a squadron of Farmans is to bomb behind the front at Verdun. The Commandant has asked us to join, as it is not complete."

"And you accepted with enthusiasm."

"Apparently."

"Then, I pause in my discourse."

"I was about to suggest it."

* * * * * * *

A row of pale acetylene lamps marked the starting line. The two biplanes were side by side, their engines at low speed. Flagada and Papa Charles, smoking a last cigarette, placidly studied their maps. Chignole flitted nervously from one to the other.

"I don't think it prudent for Flagada to fly alone."

"I would rather be alone than with an observer whom I don't know."

"But how about the bombs?"

"The mechanics have placed a release close to my hand."

"Just the same, remember what I say—I know a little something about night attacks; I've been there before, young fellah; you haven't." And Chignole swelled his chest and eyed his comrade with a fatherly air.

"The Farmans don't take any chances."

"Hop on, Chignole!" and to Flagada Papa Charles shouted: "I shall show a light from time to time. Try to follow us."

"Zou!"

With the noise of their motors enhanced tenfold by the stillness of the night, the two machines leaped toward the huge, overgrown, yellow moon that seemed to smother out the stars scattered over the sky.

"Clear weather; luck's with us!"

"I'd prefer a few clouds. They're going to wing us, over the lines; and we're not so very far away from them." Papa Charles pointed out to his companion the bluish flashes from the firing of the big guns.

"Do you see the Farmans?"

"No; but they ought to be caught in the searchlights by now."

Before them the spindles of light wavered, crossed, pursued their fleet prey and tried to clutch it.

"Those searchlights are on autos; they're feeble things; we should worry!"

But suddenly a beam whose brilliancy eclipsed the others ran up the sky. It turned, hesitated, lost its way, then discovered their machine and held it.

"Now's the time to show them we're not rookies!"

"Take your place for the tango!"

Papa Charles pulled the joy-stick; the aeroplane nosed up, leaped, took a tail-dive of several hundred metres. But the ray of light held on. Clinging to his course like an old sea-dog to the rudder, Papa Charles repeated the same manœuvre with variations. He would run down in daring glissades, then turn abruptly and dart up again. And always the white ray caught them again and blinded them. The anti-aircraft guns began to volley fiercely; their aim was getting dangerously accurate; the fliers

could already feel the shock of exploding shells.

"What's got into them, anyhow?" growled Chignole, his face buried in his arms.

"They think they've got us, that's what! I can't see any more."

Behind them Flagada, helpless, looked on at this duel between the dizzy moth and the devouring light. With eyes bursting in his head, he turned, swayed, climbed, fell back again into the entangling net of implacable light that was driving him to destruction.

"What to do!—What to do!"

The horror of the situation stupefied him. He looked down, despairing, on the bright spot from which the deadly rays diverged. Then, suddenly, an idea flashed into his head. "Yes; at least I can try it." With the boldness of desperation he cut off the gas and dived at the searchlight. With every light out and engine stopped, he slid invisible and silent, till, at a low altitude, he poised above the projector and at one stroke released the bombs.

Broum! Broum! Nothing more. Darkness.

"Flagada! I guess I've put them to sleep—What?" And he turned on the wing, gained the landing place and awaited the return of his friends.

They were not long in coming. Chignole, greatly excited, fell upon him: "Heh, old boy! We've had the most fantastic adventure—you could never imagine. We were caught by a searchli——"

But Flagada interrupted him: "No, no; let me off this time. You always have some tall yarn——"

"You mean to say you didn't see us? A searchlight caught us, drowned us; then—all of a sudden—it went out. You saw nothing?—Papa Charles will bear me out."

"No; nothing. Sweet evening for a débutant—what?" And Flagada, walking at a tranquil pace toward the billets, rejoiced that his friends did not know they owed their lives to him.

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"Put up the busses. Run a flashlight over the engines. Ease up my rudder. Fill her up for ten o'clock."

The mechanics obeyed, and their dusky silhouettes stood out, huge, against the machines shining white under the moon. Papa Charles, seated on a can of petrol, was peeling off his leather suit. Chignole, in a brown study, scratched himself behind his ear, rubbed his nose—always signs of deep perplexity with him.

"Do we go bye-low?"

"What's struck you, you dumb old oyster? —have you swallowed the cuckoo's joy-stick?"

"The matter with me, Papa Charles, is that I don't like mysteries; and we are swimming up to our eyes in a mystery."

"I don't get you."

"You don't? Then I suppose you find it quite natural that the searchlight should suddenly let us go, at the very moment when it had us at its mercy?"

"Oh, well, something happened, of course;

but I'm not going to make myself sick hunting for the wherefore of the why. Let's go to bed, that's what we need."

Night! the limitless plain mingling with the sky; a convoy climbing the sunken road that runs along the plateau; axle-trees groaning, wheels creaking, horses neighing, men swearing. The hangars thrust their massive, regular profiles into the gray picture, their silvered roofs billowing in the wind. A few lights mark the village of Bêhone; a ray of moonlight twinkles on the weather-cock on its clock-tower. The big gun keeps up its steady hammering in the giant forge that flushes red on the horizon.

"Yesterday, little old Paris; day before yesterday, back from Nice," murmured Chignole. "To-day, apprenticed to death. I'm not grousing; far from it. Still, I will confess, I was afraid to come back to the front. Yes; afraid of being afraid. I got rusty in hospital and then I had a taste of a lot of amazing things I'd never known before, and it bored me to think of leaving all that.

What can you expect! I'm no hero; I've never had the training and education that give a man the nerve to react properly to such experiences. It's not hard for you two fellows to be courageous. Often I've watched you, Papa Charles; more than once, during a raid, it almost got your goat. But you were not alone: Chignole was behind you with his eye peeled, and you pulled yourself together and posed—for the public!

"The first time a fellow leaves home, he doesn't mind; he's curious like everybody else, he wants to see what war's like. Then he's wounded, and sent back to the rear; he stops there a bit, and then's the time, old boy, when you suck the juice out of life and try all the fool things it has to offer. Me! I actually wept the first time I rode again in the Metro,—and when I saw the waffle-woman at the corner of the Rue Coustou. Then, when you're sitting calmly at a little table on the Boulevard, with a glass of something cool in front of you, you find yourself thinking: 'To-morrow I chuck all this.'

Well, old man, believe *me*, you feel as if your trousers were ripping up the back; and you're not happy about the way you'll break into the game when you get back to the front."

Papa Charles turned round, took Chignole by the shoulders, studied him, tried to read his eyes, and exclaimed in a hoarse, troubled voice: "Yes; it's true, Chignole; it's all true. But now that you're back—how do you feel?"

"Ah, good old top!—it's better than it ever was. What a fool I was to dread it! How could I be such an idiot! Scare's all gone! Like a miracle! The instant I was in the 'bus—finished and done with!—everything else forgotten. It seemed to me I had always been a soldier, and would go on being one forever. The memory of the happy hours back there—*pftt!*—gone! as at a wave of the wizard's wand; 'Vanish, little rabbit!'—Mama, Sophie; perhaps it's silly, but they hold only the second place in my thoughts—behind something I can't ex-

plain, something that overshadows all the rest—don't you know!—At midday, in full sunshine, what do you see? The sun!—nothing else. Well! just like that, my past dissolves, disappears, like the houses, the trees, the whole earth, under a dazzling light. Tell me what's the matter with me, Papa Charles."

"I know; but there aren't any words for it. *La Patrie*—France—the holy War——"

"Yes; I believe that we've had the luck to be born at the supreme moment, to accomplish great things."

They are silent, oppressed by an indefinable emotion. The wind dried the beads of sweat on their temples; the wind, that brings sick vapours from the furnaces of the battlefield, acrid odours of exploded shells and the stench of rotting flesh. Side by side they listened, deeply moved, to the voice of the great gun, now dull and distant, calling, calling them, as if it were the wounded earth that groaned.

* * * * * * *

In the tent, they undressed quickly, for the dampness oozed through the canvas. Flagada was already sleeping peacefully.

"Well, I know I'm a bore, but the story of the searchlight is yet to be explained," said Chignole, hitching up his suspenders with a characteristic gesture.

"It's certainly extraordinary that Flagada saw nothing."

"Especially—come to think of it—as he was smiling when he answered our questions; a little as if he had a joke on us."

"Well, why shouldn't he smile? There was nothing to cry about. Pshaw! We shall guess the riddle sooner or later,—more likely later. Douse the glim!"

Papa Charles slid shivering between the stiff, cold sheets. Chignole went to the table and took up the lamp.

"What am I stepping on? Oh!—Flagada's flight memorandum."

"His flight book? Pass it over! Let's see what he's put down about this evening's bombardment."

Papa Charles turned the pages quickly, Chignole leaning over him with the light: "Bombardment behind the front, Verdun. Duration: 3 hours, 10 minutes. Dropped six bombs on the Boche searchlight that was bothering my pals."

They looked at each other with wet eyes; Flagada snored.

III. THE LIGHTNING-CHANGE ARTIST

"Get up, lazy-bones!"

"What! What is it?" Flagada and Chignole, waking with a jump, stared bewildered at Papa Charles as he slipped off his helmet and rubber-coat all shiny with rain.

"While you were snoozing, I took a taxi and sized up the weather. Clouds at one hundred metres. Nothing doing."

"Nancy isn't far."

"What if it isn't?—we must see where we're going, just the same, when we skirt the St. Mihiel ridge. As for flying at one hundred metres; when I want to cut the grass, I don't take out a new machine. It's all

very well to have dual ignition; I want to know all about it before I let myself in for its eccentricities."

"So—we're expected to get up?"

"It would seem to be indicated. It's almost noon, and you run a strong risk of not finding a crumb at the mess."

"We should worry! We'll blow ourselves in for a tip-top dinner this evening; we'll pull it off somehow, but I can't get up a thrill over it just this minute, Papa Charles," yawned Chignole, trying to stretch himself awake. "Golly, but I slept! and I had a peacherino of a dream. I was sprouting wings. I soared!—I soared!—scattering all the little busses behind me as I flew."

"Our Chignole as a rival of the Angel Gabriel—fine subject for a picture. Well, my children, I also dreamed." Papa Charles fixed his eye on Flagada, but his voice was not quite steady: "A very queer dream. I saw us, yesterday evening, caught in the searchlight—blinded, done for—about to crash in a tail-spin. But a pal who was

following us caught on to the situation. Despising cannon and machine-guns, indifferent to the possible smash, never stopping to count the cost, he shut off the engine and dropped down over the searchlight. And he placed his bombs so well that the horrible light was snuffed out—and we are alive. I ask you, Chignole, what you would call the fellow who would do that?"

Silence. Flagada concealing his embarrassment very clumsily, and Chignole much affected:

"I should call him a man in a thousand! I should call him Flagada!" Then, as the latter tried to protest: "Hypocrite! Sly dog! You make me sick! I shan't play with you any more," and he leaped out of bed to hug his friend, while Papa Charles, who had got there first, gripped Flagada's hands affectionately, saying:

"We have known one another only two days, and already we owe our lives to you. How can we ever pay our debt?"

"By never mentioning it to me again—

it is agreed—never, to any one." And Flagada began to pull on his socks.

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Down the muddy road they go, the road that leads from Béhone to Bar-le-Duc. Chignole, who is his own valet, has a horror of soiling his boots, and avoids the puddles with catlike agility, grumbling as he hops:

"This bath-water is sickening. I never saw so much rain. We sure have a grouch against the Weather Man for leaving the sluices open all the time. Still—it's worse in the trenches—so don't let's whine."

An imperative Klaxon warns them to get out of the way of a rapidly moving truck, which stops when it comes up with them.

"*Will you come in?*" cries the American chauffeur in English.

"*With pleasure,*" replies Papa Charles in the same language.

"Anything for practice in the foreign tongues," murmurs Chignole, hoisting him-

self, along with his companions, into the car full of pilots of the American Escadrille. There are introductions, hearty claps on friendly shoulders, cordial greetings. Papa Charles converses; Flagada and Chignole offer their opinions freely. By the time they reach Bar-le-Duc they are all bosom friends, for Papa Charles has started the popular refrain,

"Take me in your arms and say you love me,"

which the Americans take up in chorus; and they cannot part until they have had several drinks all round.

"My, but I'm hungry! I could relish a little snack of something." Chignole clicked his teeth suggestively.

"I know where there's a cake shop; follow me," replied Flagada.

"You know these diggings?"

"Yes; I used to come here—before the war."

The cake shop.—A customer leaning on the counter eating with gusto. Huge, lean,

all legs, his long nose sticking out like a handle above his long neck, he recalls the picture of the heron in the fable. With entire calmness, methodically, without effort, he engulfs quantities of cakes, expediting their disappearance with frequent potations of sweetened wine.

"Have you any more *frangipanes*, dear Madame?" he asks the proprietress, with an agreeable smile.

"Only one, Monsieur."

"Excellent; that will make it come out just even. A dozen, isn't it?" He seizes the cake, gloats over it a moment, and in one bite it is gone.

Chignole has been staring with round eyes: "Will you take a look at our brother over there! Where does he put it all? Thin as a breath of wind! Whew! He likes *frangipanes*—what? Can you imagine what machine he flies? Where does he find a cockpit big enough to stretch his spindle-shanks? Let's get out of here! He might mistake us for creamcakes."

Flagada leads them through the labyrinth of the streets.

"Where are you taking us?"

"To a café—our kind—Café des Oiseaux."

A huge hall. The walls are lined with showcases in which are displayed the stuffed birds that give the place its name.

"He knows the ropes, our friend. Oh, Papa Charles, what do you call that bird with the big eyes?"

"A grand-duke."

"I have my doubts. He doesn't seem at his ease. Heh! What's struck you, Flagada? Don't faint, what!"

"A poster! A poster!" stammers Flagada, his eyes glued to an old, faded programme that hangs against a partition.

"What does it say?—Grand Concert—June 15, 1914.—That's not to-day, unhappily, —One of those nifty shows—I love that kind."

Flagada underlines with his finger a name printed on the programme:

PATAQUES
Lightning-Change Artist

"You know him—that barn stormer?"

"Yes; that's to say—a little. It's me." He hesitates, then brokenly: "Yes; in civil life, that's what I am. A clown at three francs a ticket, performing in the provinces and at wedding breakfasts. Lightning-Change Artist! A tenth-rate understudy of Max Dearly,* dragging his painted wretchedness and his sinister gaiety from one green room to the next. If only I were sure I had talent. But there you are! Nothing is less certain. Now and then, not often, I was conscious of being bad enough to hiss; and there were times when the public confirmed my severe but just judgment of myself . . . I need only change my trade.—Quite true!—Only—there you are again—I love the boards. My kind of a fool is a fool for life. I'd sooner be a prompter or a property man than quit the stage. You see, your new companion is an acquisition. He's not commonplace—Lightning-Change Artist." He laughed a

*The reader may here substitute the name of his favourite music-hall artist.

forced laugh, mournfully, then sat down to a table and became lost in thought.

Enter a motorcyclist and runs to Papa Charles: "The Chief of the Centre gave me this for you. A dispatch from G. H. Q. The reply to the request he telegraphed this morning, following your report."

"Sshh!" Papa Charles went up to the poster and pinned the open dispatch on it. "Flagada; look here, old man."

Under the name "Pataques," on the yellow page of the official telegram, they read:

Is cited in the order of the day:

X——, pilot in the escadrille, V.B.—Under particularly dangerous circumstances, exposed himself of his own accord to save two of his companions who were about to succumb. Succeeded fully, thanks to his courage and coolness.

Flagada trembled and tried to speak, but emotion choked him. Chignole, to save the situation, babbled:

"Since you love the theatre, behold, you have your reward!"

IV. AN AVIATIK RAID

The three friends were seated in one of the restaurants of Bar-le-Duc, where they had finally secured a table after interminable altercations in the course of which promises alternated with threats.

"Oh, very well! believe it or not, as you please,—the theatre has no more thrills for me." Chignole, in difficulties with a bone, from which he could not suck the marrow, paused a moment, then continued: "The theatre?—it's nothing but lies; that's what disillusioned me. Still, when I was a kid, I adored it. But something happened that gave me cold feet. If you like, I'll tell you in five secs."

"Anecdote!" smiled Papa Charles.

"Don't be too spiteful before a poor tyro; remember that I'm here," Flagada murmured apprehensively.

"Well, here goes! I was somewhere about fourteen and I was working at the upper end of the Rue de Belleville, in the Rue des Envierges. Naturally, I used to go to the old

theatre of the neighbourhood, whose posters advertised the shadiest melodramas in letters of blood. And what Fate decreed, befell swiftly."

"You fell in love with a star."

"It was my first offense. Yes; I became infatuated with the *ingénue*. Ah, my dear fellows; marvellous!—but she was marvellous! One of those blondes——"

"Our Chignole already had a taste for blondes!"

"And then, as for talent—extraordinary! As Fanfan in 'The Two Kids,' she moved the whole house to tears, and Limace received every variety of abuse and vegetables. After having brooded long in my heart over this grand passion, I decided to unveil to her my secret soul."

"In the words of Lagardère——"

"Don't interrupt. I wrote her a letter carefully phrased. I might as well make a clean breast of it. I finished it this way:

You will easily recognize the admirer who will have the honour to present to you his distinguished saluta-

tions at the end of the performance. During your great love scene of the eleventh act, he will put his legs over the edge of the proscenium rail.

"Irresistible attitude!"

"At midnight, very much excited, quite upset and almost ready to throw a fit, I turned my steps toward the green room door, which I had so often eyed with longing. Issued forth: the young hero, a regular masher; the villain, sinister; the heavy father, venerable; the duenna, sweet as sugar; the financier, all importance; the soubrette, amiable; the machinists, noisy; and the prompter, negligible. Finally, there appeared a woman; the smoky argand lamp over the entrance lighted up her features only too well. I recognized my *ingénue*, but without wig, without make-up, unadorned, showing all her years. Oh, imagine the disaster! She might have been her mother—at the very least. I left, disgusted; and I have always held a grudge against the theatre for destroying my first illusion."

They sat silent, each one haunted by the

ghost of his vanished youth. It touched them lightly, wrapped them round, caressed them, then vanished like smoke. But even when it had vanished, they felt it still, for it had left its perfume.

Papa Charles was the first to shake off the spell.

"The bill; let's get a move on. We must be in bed early; the barometer is still going up. There's more than a chance that to-morrow morning the sky'll be clear; and in that case we'll breakfast at Nancy."

Just as they were leaving the hotel, one of their neighbours at table said to them: "You're going back to Béhone? Look out for aviatiks."

"Aviatiks?"

"They're out almost every evening. Look sharp! They've no sense of humour."

Flagada, astonished, was about to ask for further details, when Chignole murmured in his ear: "Keep your shirt on. He's a little fresh, that fellow. Aviatiks! To-night! What a crazy idea!"

They went down the Avenue de la Gare at a brisk step. The night was clear.

"You see! I was right. The weather is fine; no clouds; a splendid night."

"The moonlight flows down the steep blue roofs," chanted Flagada.

"Halt!" cried Chignole suddenly.

"What's got you?"

"Down there in the square, a patrol; military caps, white bands; police."

"What of it?"

"You know very well we have no business in the streets at this hour."

"Let's go back the way we came. We can go single file by the station. Hide behind a tree; I believe we can work it."

"It would mean fifteeen days' arrest, if those little chaps caught us. And the Provost Marshal will make it thirty days, and the military governor will raise it to sixty; that's the tariff."

The two patrols, approaching each other, were about to bag their helpless victims, when an automobile came down a cross street

toward them at a smart pace. Papa Charles leaped to meet it, waving his cap desperately:

"Aviation!" he roared.

The car stopped: "Comrade!" cried the chauffeur.

A pleasant voice issued from the lowered carriage-hood: "Be so kind as to get in, gentlemen."

The patrols came on at double-quick: "Stop! Stop!"

But the chauffeur, by a clever turn, escaped the mounted police, and the motor lost itself in the labyrinth of narrow streets.

The excitement over, the three companions turned as one man to the unknown who had pulled them out of this scrape, but they could not make him out under the closed top.

"Thank your lucky stars—not me. I've just come back from escorting an officer of the flying squadron, one of my friends, and I'm fortunate to have arrived at the psychological moment. A little more, and undoubtedly you'd have been taken prisoners by the aviatiks."

"What's that you say?"

"Yes; that's our nickname here for the police, because of their frequent raids. We are often the victims, for your true policeman is without pity. It's an innocent title that hurts no one.—But pardon me, I had forgotten that I am not yet presented." He scratched a match, lifted his cap, and in the "grand manner," announced himself:

"Vicomte Jean-Léon de la Guérynière."

"Oh, the guy of the cake-shop, who ate creamcakes by the dozen! Well, friend Vicomte, you sure have a stomach!" cried Chignole, tapping him on the belly. And when Papa Charles voiced their gratitude, their new friend protested:

"What sort of a cad should I have been to act otherwise? In aviation we must stand by —the wings! We have to be good sports."

"You're an observer, aren't you?" inquired Flagada.

"Yes; I'm here at the annex of the R. G. A., on the look-out for a good pilot. Up to now I've had only make-believes, nuts who

landed on their front wheels. You can understand, I am quite willing to be scattered to the four winds by the Germans, but by a pal—it's not a pleasant thought."

"Well, Vicomte, I am looking for an observer.—My references?—Two hundred and seventeen hours of flight, and yesterday evening an escapade of which these gentlemen have a rather exaggerated idea. Will you make a fourth at whist? Will you change our three-handed game into a *parti carré*—of aces?"

The Vicomte scratched another match and studied the faces of the trio: "I'm your man. It's a go!"

"There's just one hitch," began Chignole. "Each one of us has a fighting name. We must baptize the Vicomte.—I have it! We'll call you Frangipane!—You don't mind?"

"Hurrah for Frangipane!"

"And the Boches had better look out—the real ones, not the aviatiks."

Four pairs of hands clasped.

* * * * * * *

"Red—it's rather giddy——"

"Don't you think gray would be more serviceable?"

"Well—how about tricolour?"

"Tricolour—there's no need to proclaim it—we wear it on our hearts, Ma'me Bassinet," her husband interposed sententiously as he knocked his pipe lightly on his sole to expel the ashes.

Seated about the lamp, the three women were choosing worsteds to make a muffler.

"Daisy stitch or Tunisian?"

"Chatterboxes! Here it's taken you an hour of talk to come to an agreement. Our Chignole's knitting might have been half finished by now."

"Pull the latch, Monsieur Bassinet, don't you hear the bell? Ten o'clock. It's old Fondu."

A slim silhouette is framed in the square panes of the lodge door. There is a timid knock.

"Come in, Fondu, come in, old boy."

M. Fondu, in the employ of the City of

Paris (Sewerage Department), replies to the invitation and creeps over to the stove. He is a slender little man, grotesque, of no particular age. He floats about in a great coat of antique pattern which sweeps his heels. On his sharp knees he balances a stove-pipe hat, which, at the time of mobilization, made him the butt of the hoodlums of the neighbourhood. He gazes complacently at his little finger-nail which he keeps very long. He coughs, and murmurs: "And our aces? —Any news?"

"Not yet. They left only yesterday morning. Besides, I have an idea they were going to stop off, *en route*, for a little spree. They've a jolly good right to it. The poor devils at the front must have their fun. They ought not to have anything to regret, if they should never come back—eh, Fondu?"

The old gentleman clucks, opens his mouth three times to speak, clucks again, and is silent. Sophie's nimble crochet needle races along the stitches; Madame Bassinet and "Mama Chignole," wind off a skein;

M. Bassinet sucks his pipe; M. Fondu contemplates his feet. Little by little a strange purring invades the silence.

"Airplanes!"

With one bound they are at the window. Overhead, there are stars that leave their places in the sky and stray among the constellations.

"The airplanes of the fortifications."

The women, touched to silence by a common thought, draw close together, fearfully. The men shake their heads, subdued by the sense of their unimportance.

"Ah, Fondu! We are nothing but useless old fools."

II

THE CLIMBERS

I. THE TARGET

"NO use talking," grinned Chignole, "our Papa Charles is a regular astrologer. He's like Nostradamus; he always gets there. He has only to prophesy fine weather to bring on a flood!"

The canvas of the tent resounded with the rain.

"It's not yet to-morrow, and you'd much better go to sleep, for if you don't get up instantly in the morning, I shall pitch a glass of water in your face."

"You won't need to, Papa Charles. That's already being attended to." The rain was running through the canvas and dripping on Chignole's bed.

"Flagada! I'm taking a footbath," cried the Lightning-Change Artist, sitting up.

"Glory! But this place is an aquarium."

It was raining on Frangipane's bed also, falling on his face; and he, fast asleep, was batting at it automatically, as if it were a fly. All of a sudden, he awoke with a snort, and the four began to consult together.

"Not very thrilling to spend the night moving beds."

"Let Flagada give us his répertoire."

"Without music? There would be no point."

"Do any of you gentlemen know Venice!" suggested Frangipane. "For I should be delighted to reminisce with him. Ah, the Lido! the Lido!"

"Stow the Lido, Vicomte, you're talking to beggars. But it occurs to me, since we're four, now's the time for a first-rate game of bridge."

They dressed quickly. An upturned box served for a table; the beds were soft chairs;

a candle stuck awry in a bottle shed a feeble light and wept tears of wax.

"A heart," Flagada declared prudently.

"No bid," said Papa Charles, shutting up his hand with a snap.

"No trump," announced Flagada, peremptorily.

"Come back. Here goes, my lad!" cried Chignole, ever ready for any risk.

* * * * * * *

They arrived safely at Nancy the next morning. The journey was devoid of incident, except for Papa Charles and Chignole, who were bound to fly over the Roman Camp, to find out whether the Boches had all the ammunition they needed.

At the headquarters of the squadron they were assigned to an escadrille and set out promptly to report for duty. Crossing the plateau, they met several old friends.

"So you're going to keep on in the *Voisin?* Night-flying's a soft snap. Have you heard? L——, the little live wire?—Went to pieces yesterday. It was partly his fault; he had

only two days on a Spad and he wanted to show off, to astonish the officers. He went up *zoumt!*—the engine gave out—down he came on one wing. Ah, my children!—They mopped him up with blotting paper!" Then, jumping without transition to another subject: "The cake-shop in the Rue des Dominicains, where we ate such good cream tarts, is closed—or, rather, opened—cut in two by a 380."

"Just my luck," murmured Frangipane.

After breakfast, when they were taking a constitutional in the pine wood, they exchanged impressions of the escadrille.

"Of course, it's very flattering to tumble into a squad of aces, but it's rather embarrassing."

"With all these Legions of Honour, we look like thirty cents."

"We really must pull off something clever."

Chignole slashed with his cane at all the little weeds within his reach, pulled his nose reflectively, then paused: "I have an idea, but it's not to the point."

"Out with it. Let's see if it's any good."

"You may have noticed at table that the conversation has turned on a very dangerous anti-aircraft battery of the Boches, which brought down several——"

"Exordium—— Yes?"

"That's all. If we could demolish it our reputation would be made—what?"

"So that's your great idea?—Congratulations! It didn't hurt you much! Our squad hasn't been waiting round for Chignole and Company to show them how to destroy a battery. They've got no results from bombing it; why should we do any better?"

"It's queer how ideas come to me when I'm ragged," Chignole announced philosophically. "Behold my visions! I see a machine flying over the aforesaid battery at twilight. What happens?"

"The battery fires."

"But as night is coming on—what do we see?"

"The flash of the shells," answered Papa Charles, suddenly interested.

"Second vision! Another machine prowling over the lines. It notes the exact position of the battery by the flashes from the guns, and signals the range to our artillery by wireless."

"Come on, fellahs!" cried Papa Charles. And they went back to the hangars at double quick.

When the Captain's consent had been obtained, Chignole superintended the installation of the wireless. It was agreed that Flagada's machine should serve as target; and to handle it with the least effort, they put in as little weight as possible: the exact allowance of petrol and oil—no more.

The afternoon arrived. A last telephone call to the artillery of the sector, to make sure of a good connection, and Papa Charles started up first, to try his luck. The late spring had not yet altered the face of the country. The forests were still black; the grayish meadows and the bare fields still showed their furrows in sharp relief. Nevertheless, the sun was

painting Nancy with the tenderest tints of his palette; the bell-towers were rose, the roofs, dove-coloured, the golden gates of Jean Lamour were burnished new.

"Now I've got my bearings," cried Chignole. "There's the Rue St. Jean—the Rue du Pont-Mouja,—la Pépinière. She climbs!—Two thousand metres. Great sport, Papa Charles!"

A machine appeared above Malzéville and dived toward the lines.

"It's Flagada. Forward March!"

They pass the trenches. They unwind the antennæ of the wireless. The details of the landscape dissolve, little by little, but certain landmarks remain visible. The target plane circles, dips very low, like a bird hesitating above its nest.

"Ready!" Chignole taps the key and sends up the signals agreed on.

Suddenly a flash, followed by several others, streaks across the dusk. Chignole locates on his map.

"Square 97." He presses the key twice.

A few seconds, and two explosions show him that our artillery has obeyed.

"Over."

The target plane is now being harassed at close quarters by the shrapnel.

"What have the poor nuts been drinking!"

"If the gunners reduce the range—they're done for."

Suddenly, the flashes mingle with the yellow smoke of our shells.

"Fire like hell!" shrieks Chignole, hitting the key a smashing blow. "Forward, boys! and let her rip! Don't be stingy with the shells."

The battery site disappears in a cloud of smoke which reddens in spots. The target-plane gets no more shots and the white puff balls of the last shrapnel dissolve little by little.

"I think the Boches will be quiet for a little while. Fall in, mates, for a tango celebration."

Papa Charles cuts down the gas and indulges his biplane in various weird and clever

stunts. Flagada does likewise, and in the calm, serene, violet evening the two victorious taxis return to their stable, cutting capers to relieve their drivers' feelings.

Their captain—an ace whom nothing, not even honours, could surprise—gave them his felicitations. Then, addressing himself specially to Frangipane he said: "Let's see, my friend, you're only a débutant; you must have had a bad quarter of an hour. How did you feel?"

And Frangipane, with his quizzical and slightly reserved air, replied: "To tell the truth, Captain, I've never had any emotions except at Venice. I say!—On such a night, on the steps of the Church of the Scalzi, a woman——"

"Good-night!" snapped the Captain, and beat a retreat, muttering: "I've had some freaks in this squad—but this guy!"

II. GAME'S UP

"The war gets worse and worse," Chignole announced in melancholy tones, scraping

the mud off his boots with the point of his knife. "Last year, it was comparatively easy to bring down sausages. You remember, Papa Charles?"

The latter, buried in a newspaper, assented with a grunt. Flagada, astride his bed, was carefully paring his almond-shaped nails, while Frangipane, shifting from one leg to the other, munched a biscuit.

"I say, Gang!—why don't you take an interest in what I'm saying?" sputtered Chignole. "For heaven's sake, what's your grouch? You needn't act so sulky." And pointing out of the window at the great fat yellowish sausage suspended over the lines: "Don't tell me you can look at that swollen gullet without boiling over." After this outburst, he retired into wrathful silence.

Papa Charles threw aside his paper, caught Frangipane by the arm as he was making for the door, signed to Flagada and Chignole to sit down by him and then began seriously, in a low voice: "Let's talk it out. As for setting fire to them in the daytime, that sort

of thing's ended; those good old times are over; no use harking back to them. Still, on a fine night, when the details of the landscape were absolutely clear, it might not be impossible to succeed."

"Yes; but when we'd retrieved the sausage, we'd have to go down to at least one hundred metres."

"Fifty."

"Behind the Boches' lines."

"Sure."

"And what if there's a breakdown?"

"We stay there.—Conclusion?"

"We'll do it this evening. It's a go!"

When the Captain was consulted, he protested vehemently; but he knew how obstinate they were. And they did not let him alone until they had obtained his consent. On one or two points, however, he was firm.

"Granted, on two conditions: one machine only; you can decide among you which goes. And—you're not to go up unless I'm there. Understand?"

"Oh, Captain!—You're an ace!" And Chignole saluted, flushing with delight.

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The air was soft; the night was clear; the moon in all her splendour blotted out the stars caught in the ring of her white light. The wind blew lightly on the guy-ropes that held the hangars taut. In the one barrack that was lighted, shadows passed now and then across the window screen.

"Let me take your place, Chignole."

"Awfully sorry, Vicomte; but not this time."

"Papa Charles thought of the expedition; it's natural he should go. But you——?"

"You, who are engaged," added Flagada.

"Save your breath, my friends. In the first place, everybody's more or less engaged; secondly, Papa Charles without me would not be Papa Charles; finally, now that I'm reinstated in aviation, I want to show them that I'm as fit as I ever was. 'Nough said."

They left the hut, and as they passed the

headquarters tent, Papa Charles lifted the tent flap: "We're leaving, Captain!"

"No fog?"

"No, sir."

"Wait, I want to see for myself." He appeared in his dressing gown, scrutinized the horizon carefully, and turned his electric lamp on the barograph. "Go ahead, boys; but if, when you're up, you find it the least bit hazy; if the engine doesn't work just right; don't hesitate, return at once."

They shook hands silently.

"Get a move on, Mimile!" cried Chignole entering the hangar.

Mimile, the mechanician, jumped from the cockpit where he had been napping with one eye open. As he was lighting the acetylene torches, the sentry post turned on the searchlight.

"Is it all ready?"

"Would I be snoring, if it wasn't?"

"Right you are, Mr. Mimile."

While the travellers were settling themselves, Flagada and Frangipane looked over

the exposed parts of the controls. They clambered up on the footboards.

"Here," said Frangipane to Chignole, giving him a pocketbook. "A thousand francs in Boche banknotes. It may be useful."

"Here," said Flagada to Papa Charles, handing him a Browning. "The latest plaything of the year, eight balls in three seconds. It may be useful."

"Were there ever such pals!" murmured Chignole, overwhelmed. And Papa Charles started off abruptly to hide his feelings.

They left the earth. The houses of Nancy cast their pointed shadows on the pallid streets. The curves of the Meurthe toward Tomblaine were shining like polished steel. At the factories of Dombasle tongues of fire shot up into the sky.

"Don't mistake the Moselle for the Meurthe."

"I'm skirting the Marne-Rhine Canal. Look at the revolution-counter. The hand's jumping."

"Yes; the mill's making a funny noise."

"It's not normal. Shall we go back?"

Go back? The thought chilled them. Their pride was hard hit. What would their comrades think?—and the Captain? They would have to confess that luck had deserted them. Already they felt humiliated, degraded.

"We should worry! Let's go on."

"Same here!"

Above the lines.—A few shells; but as the moon is full the searchlights are not so intense and the aim is wide.

"I'll make a loop to fool them."

They go rambling above the pool of Lindre. They fly over Dieuze, Morhange, then take the direction of Château-Sâlins.

Papa Charles slackens his speed: "Do you hear? Skipping?"

"A little water in the carbureter. She'll win out. Don't you worry!"

They descend.—Chignole scans the landscape. In a glade is a kind of dome, white under the moon.

"There's the objective."

With gas cut off, the biplane slides down noiselessly. Papa Charles makes the contact from time to time, to be sure of the connection.

"Eighty metres. Not yet. Don't be in a hurry. Don't miss it. Get your rockets ready."

But to volplane better he has shortened his dive too much, and the propeller stops in spite of all his efforts to make the engine go again. In their desperation they stand almost upright in the cockpit.

"Hell!"

"Game's up."

Papa Charles noses up; the machine clears the trees and lands right-side up in a meadow. They are on the edge of a village whose first houses they can just make out. Nothing stirs. They venture to breathe.

"Talk about adventures!"

"Hurry up down there. Let's get out."

As soon as he touched the engine, Chignole's dexterity came back to him. He took the nuts out of the cover of the distribu-

tor, feverishly: "I knew it! The distributor arm is fouled; the ebonite box isn't tight, the coils are covered with oil and the mill turns too slow to make a spark."

"How much time will it take?"

"To dry it out? We must have a fire, first thing."

"Time, I ask you; how much time?"

"Look! Will you look!"

The sky was paling; the moon was fading; the stars were going out; the leaves trembled under the wind of dawn.

"Day!" murmured Chignole softly, bending his head. "Game's up!—Prisoners!"

"Never!" and Papa Charles patted the trigger of the pistol in his pocket.

* * * * * * *

The machine had long been swallowed up in the night, but Frangipane and Flagada did not dream of leaving the plateau. They walked up and down restlessly, their hands in their pockets, stopping only to light fresh cigarettes. Mimile consulted his watch every

few minutes and put it to his ear to make sure that it was going.

"Are you sure they took their map?"

"Yes, Flagada; and Chignole even pasted at the top the ten thousandth detail as to the position of the sausage."

"You didn't forget to fill her up with water?"

"What! That radiator dribbled up to the time they left."

"They'll have crossed the lines by now."

"They'll have made the goal——"

"Not yet. Papa Charles is much too clever to give his scheme away to them at once."

"Did you examine the magneto carefully?"

"As I would for myself; as if I myself had been going to fly the 'bus."

The night freshened. A cock on the Malzéville farm invited his brothers to sing matins. The Captain came toward them, still in his dressing gown, his field glasses slung over his shoulder.

"You've not yet seen signs of German shelling over the lines?"

"No, sir; nothing."

"They won't be long, now."

One by one the squad arrived, in slippers, their tunics thrown hastily over their shoulders.

"When did they go up?"

"At half-past two, sir."

"Twenty minutes past four. They ought to be in sight. Telephone the artillery; doubtless the observers can give us news."

A secretary ran to Headquarters. The sky, emptied of its stars, was gray, but where it touched the earth, it was turning to rose. It was as if a huge fire kindled the horizon. Golden beams arose on all sides, sprung as if from magic fireworks.

"The sun!"

Eyes questioned the void; hearts were wrung with an unreasoning anguish.

The artillery telephoned: "Nothing to report."

"If they're not here in ten minutes——"

The Captain ended his sentence with a significant shrug.

Yonder in the light of the dawn, the enemy sausage swayed heavily.

They looked at one another and said nothing. Death was passing by.

III. GO DOWN! THEY'RE ASKING FOR YOU

Seated on the grass, at the foot of the biplane, Chignole was mechanically plucking the little Easter daisies. He awaited with resignation the stroke of Fate and the orders of his companion. Papa Charles, his face distorted with helpless rage, sputtered meaningless phrases between drawn lips.

"Set fire to the cuckoo. Save ourselves—there's the forest. Hide—till to-night. Cross the lines——"

Chignole rose calmly, thrust the posies into his pocket, scratched a match, and unscrewed the stopper of the petrol tank.

"Stop!" cried Papa Charles in a shaking voice, hesitant in the face of the irreparable. "Let's try once more to start her. Hurry!"

In the pale morning, while Chignole, groping, did his best to buck up the engine, Papa Charles, in the cockpit, with one hand on the control, the other at the trigger of the machine gun, waited for the enemy. Before them, a road bordered with trees; on the right and behind, a wood; on the left, fifty metres away, the village. Daylight kindled the window panes; horses neighed; a bell rang.

"Well!"

"I've cleaned the distributor as well as I can. Open the petrol."

Just then a sharp little trumpet shook out the tripping notes of the German reveille. Papa Charles smothered an oath and gnawed his fingers till they bled. Chignole, glued to the propeller, cranked it violently. The engine responded with a hoarse sigh.

"She speaks! Up, my beauty!"

Chignole, dripping with sweat, covered with oil and axle-grease, his gaze fixed, his hair blowing in the wind, hideous and superb, recranks the screw with the energy of despair. Explosions in the cylinder!—Irregular, then

rhythmic! In the doorway of a house a soldier—a Boche—appears. He stands amazed at sight of the tricolour on the aeroplane, but pulls himself together and aims his gun.

"Tac—tac—tac—tac!"

Papa Charles has fired. Like wheat before the scythe, the soldier drops, head first, arms extended crosswise. The biplane spins. Chignole comes aboard with a flying leap and seizes the machine gun, while his comrade grips the steering gear. The curtain of trees approaches with terrible rapidity.

"What do you bet, we make our getaway?"

The trees! The trees! Will it be a smash-up? Papa Charles shuts his eyes instinctively and pulls the joy-stick. The machine hesitates, seems to hang motionless, to gather itself together like a horse at a fence. Papa Charles opens his eyes. The wheels are brushing the green tree-tops. Cleared! He noses down lightly to prevent a slip. Down on the road there is a whirlwind

of dust where the automobiles are dashing after them.

"Whoop-la! Hi—! you boobies!" chortles Chignole.

In climbing, they have come back again over the village, where an enemy battalion, evidently quartered there, takes them for a target.

"Save your bullets, gawks!"

At a window of the house on whose threshold they had so lately landed women are waving frantic handkerchiefs.

"*Vive la France!* We shall meet again soon!"

Papa Charles, in fine fettle, whirls, turns, capers—always following the homeward road. At eight hundred metres Chignole lets out a yell which drowns the roar of the engine.

"Golly, old chap! we're going to make a good job of it after all! Fine work!"

Below them the sausage—their German sausage—soars peacefully.

"Do you get her?"

"I think so."

Papa Charles dives at full speed. The balloon swells beneath their eyes as they make their dizzy descent. Papa Charles flattens out abruptly. Chignole launches the incendiary rockets. They turn over on the wing to get the effect—and a thick black smoke fringed with purple envelops the balloon, which makes several plunges; then—bursts.

"Go down! They're asking for you!" declaims Chignole in the tone of a funeral oration.

"They haven't wasted our time. They'll be suffocated, poor devils!"

"If you want my advice, don't say anything about this to the others; they'd never believe you."

Then they abandoned themselves to the sweet satisfaction of having escaped a great danger. All the reflections which they were unable to indulge in at the crucial moment beset them now that they were safe.

"Prisoners!" thought Chignole. "What a dirty trick! And me just about to be mar-

ried. What a bouquet for a bridegroom! And my poor Sophie laid on the shelf." But his natural optimism soon got the upperhand. "Still it would have been better than being knifed. And besides, there's always a way to manage. Birds like us wouldn't stay long in their clutches. We should soon have been singing the *Chant du Départ.*"

"Prisoners!" thought Papa Charles. "What should I have done if the 'bus had left us in the lurch? Sold my skin dearly—fired my last cartridge? Yes; but even so, Chignole would have been shot. Surrender? Gaol until the end of the war." A series of unpleasant images passed before his mind, and he smiled happily at the sunny land of France, beckoning them, calling them.

"Here's where we break our necks.—There's a barrage of Fokkers over the lines."

"Six! That's a little thick. Any more petrol?"

"Enough for an hour."

"We'll make it!"

They refused combat, made a left oblique, and crossed the Seille above Marsal. The Fokkers turned at the same angle, but they were embarrassed in their chase by having the sun directly in their faces.

"They're not gaining on us."

"No, but another squad is coming to meet us."

"Six behind—three in front!—It's getting unhealthy."

"What's the name of the place we're flying over?"

"Azoudanges."

"Well, we're headed for its cemetery, all right; but we're not the only ones that'll sleep there.—Pigs!"

Papa Charles plunged, stood up on end and turned, and charged into the troop of six. His manœuvre was so unexpected that the Boches could not turn for fear of going down together. They were obliged to scatter, and Papa Charles profited by the ensuing confusion to make for the frontier, while Chignole covered their retreat with repeated salvos.

The Boches, however, did not consider themselves beaten, and forming anew in a semi-circle, they charged the biplane.

"They won't get us; there are the trenches."

"Yes, but look!" Right above them a machine approached at frantic speed, and with the wind in its favour. "That one will get us, sure!"

But Chignole had seized his field glasses. "No; Papa Charles, that one won't get us—for that one—is Frangipane and Flagada."

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Above their own ground, they let themselves go in fantastic gyrations, as if in a drunken machine, and landed with engine stopped, in perfect form.

When the Captain came up to compliment them, Chignole drew from his pocket the flowers which he had put there.

"Pardon us for being late, but we stopped to pick these. It occurs to me you might like to send this bouquet to your wife, Captain. It's from Lorraine. She won't find

these flowers at the florists in little old Paris, and I'm sure they'll give her pleasure."

IV. CHIGNOLE GETS MARRIED

"Don't lean out of the window, little daughter. Look out for trains coming from the opposite direction, and for cinders from the engine. You'd be a lovely sight if you came to your wedding with an eye as big as that——"

M. Bassinet showed Sophie his two fists clasped together to make his effect; then, satisfied by his unanswerable argument, he retired deeper into his corner, chewing his pipe which had been out some time. Opposite him, his wife slept noisily, her double chin propped on her breast which was upheld by her corsets. Beside her, M. Fondu was squeezed up asleep; but always dignified, he held clasped on his knees the stovepipe hat which he could not bear to trust to the net overhead. He dared not lean back against the cushions of the compartment lest he crack his shirt-front, and his body bounced

and rattled with the motion of the train. In the opposite corner, Maman Chignole slept, her head in a black muslin scarf which set off her silvery hair. Now and then the weary lines about her mouth would vanish, and she would smile lingeringly at her dream, her son. Although M. Bassinet was bored by the silence and felt the need of exchanging opinions with someone, he did not venture to wake them; but turned once more to Sophie:

"How you do persist in looking out of the window! Really, child, it's high time you got married; there's no living with you any more."

But the girl, with eyes half closed by the wind that blew her blonde curls, followed the course of the train anxiously, trying hard to decipher the names of the stations which they passed without stopping.

"Nancy, Papa! Here's Nancy!"

M. Bassinet rammed his pipe with a powerful thumb, and woke the sleepers: "Well! We've come through without a

collision! Ma'me Bassinet, I'm not finding fault, but ever since we left the Gare de l'Est, what haven't you given us in the way of music! The orchestra of the Garde Républicaine isn't in it with you!—But let's be serious. We're here. We must be ready for anything. The bundles are numbered; everybody carry his own!"

They were bumping over the switches. The brakes squeaked; the wheels slowed up. M. Bassinet polished the buttons of his raiment with his sleeve, settled his cravat, and gave his glazed hat a rakish tilt.

"Let's be getting out. The head of the family first." Then, with a severe countenance: "We must mind our manners; here, we are at the front."

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The mechanics, who had got up early on purpose, were decorating the interior of the hangar called "Bessonneau," after its builder, where the religious ceremony was to take place. Chignole's officers, wishing to show him a special mark of their affection and

esteem, had decided to give him an out-and-out "aviation" wedding, and therefore to celebrate it in his unit.

A biplane spread its wings above the altar where the priest was to officiate. Behind him, in the alcove, "Fatty," and "Hurricane Harry," repeated one last time, under their breath, a "Panis Angelicus." "Fatty" was a little roly-poly man with a head like a billiard ball, eyes like marbles, a pot-belly, and legs the shape of stovepipes. A chorister in a church at Versailles, he had a pleasant though nasal voice. "Hurricane Harry" had been conceived all in one dimension: he was long, with a big nose as sharp as a razor. He did not walk; he cleft, he pricked, he pierced. A musical clown in civil life, he was a virtuoso upon a violin made of a cigar box, a broom handle, and strings of a sort. These two—pilot and observer respectively in Chignole's squad—had planned an agreeable surprise for him by combining their talents.

Midday.—Automobiles, animated groups, hubbub. The procession made its way with

solemnity from the mayor's house to the hangar. At the head walked the Bassinet of this great occasion, apoplectic in an extremely tall celluloid collar, his eye moist, his moustache bristling with emotion. Sophie's little gloved hand lay lightly on his great knotty arm; her blonde hair was braided in a crown; although embarrassed, yet she smiled under her veil.

"The pretty little darling!" exclaimed Mimile as she passed by. "She's like a flower! I can understand that kind of marriage."

Behind, Chignole strutted to conceal his anguish. The violent beating of his heart shook his decorations on their new ribbons. He escorted Madame Bassinet, scintillating in her trained dress of garnet velvet trimmed with bugles. A huge bird brooded on her hat.

Dazzled, staggered, upset by this adventure, for which forty years of office-life had left him unprepared, M. Fondu felt as if a trap-door would open and swallow him up at

his next step. Nevertheless, in his best manner, he gave his arm to "Mama Chignole," very distinguished in her neat and simple toilette. Behind came Papa Charles, Frangipane, Flagada, and the noisy crowd of all their comrades in variegated uniforms.

The ceremony began. Fatty's sacred song, assisted by the accompaniment of Hurricane Harry, rose sublime above the bent heads. The big guns, far away, played a *basso profundo*.

"Those guys sure can warble!" murmured Chignole, gazing, deeply moved, at the little figure, so white and delicate, which knelt beside him.

M. Bassinet contemplated the Captain, the officers; counted up the crosses, the medals, the palms, and plumed himself on the honour that was being paid his family. Ah, if the lodgers in the house could see all this! They would undoubtedly pay up more promptly, and not invoke the moratorium. They would have some respect for their concierges.

Madame Bassinet wept silently. Her tears fell on the fine missal which she had not carried since her marriage, and which still smelt of the camphor from the wardrobe in which she kept her old treasures. "Mama Chignole" prayed. M. Fondu rolled his bewildered eyes.

Immediately after the benediction there was a sudden hurly burly, and an excited secretary made his way to the Captain: "Communication from G.H.Q. In reprisal for the bombarding of open towns, a raid on Metz."

The Captain raised his hand, and the hangar was emptied immediately. Everybody hustled, running to his own machine. Hurricane Harry tossed his violin to M. Fondu who was gaping at all this madness. Fatty hummed the words of the *Marseillaise* to the tune of the *Veni Creator.* Chignole, caught in the geveral fever, would have darted off despite Sophie whose fingers clung to his hand, but the Captain called him back peremptorily.

"Ah, no, my boy, not you. You're

on leave. To-day you belong to your wife. France would not have you so unfaithful."

While the planes rose one by one, their engines purring gaily, drunken with sun and light, and dived toward the frontier between the Moselle and the Seille, Chignole and the civilians went down to Nancy. He was happy; yes, he was happy; but why did the ring that shone on his finger suddenly feel heavy? Ah, it is hard to love—to bind one's self, and to fight!

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That night, the dining room of the hotel, where the wedding feast took place, was stormed by the same noisy band of the morning. They sat down, and Frangipane was already casting longing eyes at a cake plate.

"Two people are absent," M. Bassinet announced, pointing to the empty places.

There was an abrupt silence, then the voice of Papa Charles rose, deep and sad: "It is

Fatty and Hurricane Harry. They will not be here. They were left behind."

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The deep forest is stirred this evening by a thousand noises. The wind flutters the flames of torches held by soldiers in gray-green uniform. They light up fitfully a tragic tangle of wood and metal that men are methodically trying to clear up. In its fall, the airplane has mowed down branches of trees and the earth is strewn with leaves and twigs. Someone gives brief commands. More lights are brought and the corpses are revealed. Death has respected their faces. With eyes closed, they seem to sleep. The bodies are imprisoned within the machine which holds them as if it would never let them go. The lugubrious workmen try to free them from their bonds, but find them so crushed in their fur coats that there is no chance of getting them out whole. The linen of the wings hangs in rags—tattered and torn. A cockade in three colours, almost

whole, waves from the top of a pine-tree, like a challenge to Fate. A saw creaks upon a small aluminium bar beneath which an arm is caught. The clenched hand, on which the blood has dried in blackish flakes, still threatens. Now, on the stretchers, there are only two dead weights that make the bearers stagger.

Ditches at the edge of a sunken road. The smell of upturned earth, of trampled moss, of torn roots losing their sap. A picket doing the last honours to the dead. Fatty and Hurricane Harry rest in German soil.

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The dinner proceeded. Flagada went through his répertoire, then imitated Mayol and Sarah Bernhardt in turn. The Captain made a little speech in honour of the bride and the groom; a simple little speech, but it touched all hearts.

M. Bassinet would have responded with the formal address which he had prepared beforehand and learned by heart, but the

champagne, although it made him very happy, had wiped his speech from his memory. Nevertheless, he rose, his goblet trembling in his hand:

"Captain, I shall say nothing; but my silence will speak. Do you understand my silence?" And he sat down amidst loud applause, under the impression that he had been quoting from Lamartine.

"I'm so glad he stopped there," murmured Madame Bassinet in Papa Charles's ear. "If he had once got twisted up in his words, the war would have ended before he got through."

"Mama Chignole" gazed down at the photograph-brooch which fastened her waist, and smiled at the twin medallions of her husband and her son. They did not look like father and child, but like two brothers. How proud the dear departed would have been to be present at this glorification of his little son! But would his happiness be unsullied, complete? Would he not resent with her the grim sadness masked beneath

this festival. For many of these merry-makers the hours are numbered. His son perhaps is one of them.

"Poor darling! I wish I might keep you; defend you! If it were only blood that were needed; would that they might take the blood of us who have lived, who are worn out. Would that the parents might be sacrificed, the children spared. Not him; me—me—no longer good for anything—not him!" This is what the imperceptible quiver of her lips really said.

M. Fondu, emerging from his confusion, was about to get on his feet, when he conceived the original idea of questioning Flagada about aviation. And Flagada, fluent to a degree, drowned him beneath the flood of slang current in the fifth arm of the service. M. Fondu, submerged, had only the strength to stammer: "G-G-Gas!"

Frangipane gathered together by ingenious manœuvres the plates of cakes, passed them in review, made his choice, and provisioned himself for a future emergency.

Suddenly, the sinister bellowing of a siren hushed the voices, arrested the laughter.

"One call. That's only one plane."

They went to the windows, and saw a biplane of the guard rise from the plateau, and passing over them, light its beacons to salute them. The searchlights revolved; in the direction of the lines there were flashes from shells.

"It ought to be visible. The call came from Frouard. Now!—the plateau battery is firing!"

But, immediately, the firing began to come at longer intervals. The hammering died away—stopped.

"Merely a warning. A stray plane, or a witty Boche, come to remind us that it's time to leave our young couple." And the Captain gave the signal for breaking up.

The night was mild and white. The cathedral threw the lengthening shadow of its little bell-towers on the stones of the square. Night lamps revealed peaceful interiors between the half-open Persian blinds.

The wind brought with it the smell of lilac and acacias from the gardens. The intoxication of spring touched the young men, brushing them lightly. The moon, the lights and the sweet smells bewitched them, mingling so indistinguishably that the darkness seemed mauve because it smelt of lilacs, and the night was pale because it was fragrant with acacia. Just when they had crossed the bridge of Essey, a carriage drew up, with Mimile crouching rabbit-fashion on the footboard.

"Cap'n there?" he cried.

"Yes. Anything the matter?"

"The Boche who flew over dropped a bag that fell on the 75 near the telemeter. There was a letter in it which announced that Fatty and Hurricane Harry had been brought down by one of their men and killed in the fall."

Death, forgotten for the moment, gripped them anew. They felt her very close to them—prowling near them, in the dark corners, in the echo of their footsteps. Their

shoulders drooped and they stared at the ground as if they had stumbled upon their own graves. Presently, as they climbed up the hillside by slippery by-paths, the trio, the rear-guard, exchanged ideas.

"Funny to be only three of us!"

"Chignole's a quitter."

"You'll see, he won't be the same. Idiotic idea to get married during the war. Chignole's a fool."

But Papa Charles shook his head: "No, no; the fool is the wisest of us. If Chignole stays out here—when it's over—at least he won't die utterly. He's the only one of us four to give hostages to fortune, and he'll fight all the better because he's defending his own interests, his own property, in concrete form."

"Just the same, old chap, a bird ought not to have a string round its claw. By jinks, we have our feelings, too—you bet!—but no ties for mine, to make the struggle more painful and difficult. If we're going to be sparrows, better have sparrows' hearts."

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Chignole and Sophie were lingering behind the hotel in the arbour in the garden.

"Above all, my pet, don't worry. The war won't last long as the taxes. When the play is played out, I shall fall on my feet and get a good job. You see what fine friends I have. Don't be scared. The Boches won't get me. In the first place, Papa Charles is an ace; and besides, he's a lucky dog. Me, too."

Sophie believed in him. He was no longer the common, bumptious kid, her rather vulgar comrade of Montmartre, her noisy escort on suburban Sundays, grumbling because he had to carry the crochet-bag of lunch. War had transformed him. He had gained in dignity and manliness, and had acquired a determined carriage, vigorous and erect. He was strong; he was handsome; he had fulfilled her dream of him, and she seemed to herself a very poor little thing beside his splendour.

"My husband—you are my husband now!"

"Little wife!—Little, little wife!"

Her fingers played with his hair.

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A tremendous explosion shook the air.

"The 380's over Nancy!"

A shell had knocked out the front of the hotel, so that from top to bottom, the rooms were entirely disclosed. Firemen with hatchets, soldiers with torches, ran about in the ruins, mingling with the guests of the hotel, who had been caught in their night clothes. "Mama Chignole" had found her children unharmed, like herself. On the first floor M. Bassinet in his drawers, but with his glazed hat shoved firmly down on his ears, held up a sheet before Madame Bassinet, to hide her scanty apparel from the crowd.

"The Kaiser must have heard we were spending the night here."

As for M. Fondu, he had tumbled downstairs into the cellar, and awaited the turn of events at the bottom of a trunk.

V. FIRE

The railroad station at Nancy. Before the ticket window, M. Bassinet passing his retinue in review.

"Come, come, children! No sadness! Self-control's the word! Take pattern by yours truly. What if last night we experienced unpleasant sensations! Nevertheless, what glory for us—civilians! Ah, ah! Think of the tales I shall tell my cronies in town! And the absolute proofs I can produce, of the truth of what I tell them!" He drew from the depths of his vest pocket a piece of a shell.

"You must have it mounted as a cravat pin, Father-in-law."

"I also can show proofs," murmured the plaintive M. Fondu mournfully displaying his stovepipe hat reduced to an accordion.

"Step lively, please," said a guard.

The Paris express at half-past seven in the morning.

"Let's choose a compartment well toward the middle of the car, between the trucks. Get in first, Sophie, so we can hand you the bundles. Oh, little daughter, little daughter —but you are absent-minded this morning!

However, everybody understands!" added M. Bassinet, a merry twinkle in his eye. At the bottom of his heart the good man had little desire to laugh, but he knew he must be diverting, or the parting would be gloomy.

"Monsieur Papa Charles, you won't forget to give my regards to your captain and your comrades, especially Messieurs Flagada and Frangipane. However, I shall come back. When I am with you I feel young again. Great guns! I could almost believe that I also—yes, even I—belonged to the aviation corps and that I was going to smack their dirty mugs!"

During this harangue, Chignole had surreptitiously joined Sophie in the compartment. They smiled at each other; and held back their tears for each other's sake.

"You'll write me often?"

"Yes, Sophie."

"Every day?"

"Every day."

"You'll be careful?"

Chignole hesitated.

"He'll be prudent, dear little Madame, I promise you," declared Papa Charles, putting in his head at the window.

Madame Bassinet and "Mama Chignole" pretended to follow M. Bassinet's patriotic discourse religiously, but in reality they did not hear him at all. They felt frightfully alone, shut up within themselves.

Sophie no longer belongs to you, Madame Bassinet, but to this young man who loves her and who involuntarily already makes her suffer, since he must stay here, and she must leave him.

And you, "Mama Chignole," already widowed, henceforth you will have no child. You have given your son twenty years of your life, the most beautiful years; you even gave up the idea of marrying again, for his sake, and now his heart turns first to Sophie. He belongs to his wife and to the war. What of your share in him, paid for by your toil, your unhappiness, your self-sacrifice? Shut up in themselves they felt frightfully alone, and they drew close together—two poor forlorn old women.

"All aboard!" Doors slammed; there were cries, whistles, the noise of escaping steam, waving of handkerchiefs, good-byes. Then a great silence beneath the station's smoky canopy. Yonder, where the rails seem to join, an indistinct mass diminishes, fades, and disappears around the first turn.

In the motor-car which is taking them back to the plateau, Papa Charles respects Chignole's silence. The fields of rye, beneath the wind, look like the sea in autumn, silver-green. In the blossoming hedges butterflies, giddy with sunshine, rest heavily on the flower-petals. Large stones, where lizards are sunning themselves, seem encrusted with emeralds. Water runs through the trembling grass. It is as if they tasted and savoured the life of every living thing, breathing in the summer with all their strength, as if it were a heavy perfume.

"Your turn on patrol," said the secretary when they got back to the escadrille.

"So much the better."

Occupation, work, that's the antidote for

homesickness. Hardly had they come up to their biplane when Chignole began to call:

"Mimile! Mimile! I bet that blockhead is still lying out on the grass, gazing up into the trees. Will you look at the mill! Covered with oil! Mimile!"

"You know very well that he went up with me yesterday."

"What of that? Would it break his back to give it a brushing up? One more lazybones born on a Sunday. I'll give him a piece of my mind. I don't get up in a 'bus in that condition."

"Yes, you do. Listen: the train for Paris stops at the Frouard station some little time, to punch the tickets. Well—during our patrol—an easy loop—and whoop! We'll dive over them and give them a surprise."

"Papa Charles, you're an ace of aces!"

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M. Bassinet had substituted carpet slippers for his boots. "Come, make yourselves comfortable! Ma'me Bassinet, don't you

want to take off your corsets?—No? I won't insist, but you don't know how to travel. Fondu, suppose you take advantage of the stop to give me the basket."

"You're going to begin to eat already?"

"Ma'me Bassinet, when we eat we don't think; it's always that way."

Sophie had not taken her eyes from the plateau at the foot of which the train had halted.

"There they are! There they are!"

"What! Who!" cried M. Bassinet with his mouth full and a wine bottle between his knees.

An airplane rose, went down again, turned in graceful evolutions. With one bound, M. Bassinet was at the door: "It's them! It's them, sure enough! I can make out the figure on their cockpit." (Every head went out of the window.) "Yes, ladies and gentlemen," he explained to the neighbouring compartments, "it's my son-in-law and his boss. In other words, two aces, up there, giving you this grand, free exhibition."

There was a cry of horror.

"Don't look, little daughter; don't look," shouted M. Bassinet, covering Sophie's face with his hands.

The biplane was crashing down in flames.

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The sun, already high above the horizon, heated the strata of air unequally, and besides, the biplane was very unsteady as there was almost no wind.

"Wouldn't this jar you!"

"See her toboggan!"

With no air to hold up its wings, the machine fell straight down like a stone, and grazed the bell-tower of Dommartemont.

"You must acknowledge, Papa Charles, that that's no way to enter a church."

Papa Charles, by light, combined movements of joy-stick and rudder-bar, subdued the restive bird as a horseman alternately pulls on the bit and gives the horse his head.

"Happily the engine's holding out. But for that we should go head over heels, and then what!"

"Five hundred metres—it's working. We'll push toward the lines to see if there are any Boches reported—then half a turn—and we'll make for Frouard."

"As you like. But do you think we'll catch their train?"

"You don't allow for the fact that we are frisking along at one hundred and thirty an hour, M. Chignole."

A road over which vehicles creep. A village of ruined houses. A mangled forest. Fields torn by shells which have turned up from the depths of the earth a bright clay whose colour glares sharply against the uniform brown of the soil. Before them, at their level, four white puff balls bloom and burst. Chignole examines the sector carefully with his field-glass.

"Nothing in sight. Still, let's examine that little bundle of filth over there."

They dive toward a black cloud with copper-coloured edges which spread over the blue. They turn around it, fly over it, then, letting themselves fall into the very middle of

it, they go through it from one side to the other.

"Empty as an open purse!'

Next, with the wind at their backs, they return above Nancy. The fortress of Frouard traces upon the surrounding forest the regular star of its fortifications, like a seal in soft wax. The shining parallel rails follow the windings of the river. The train has stopped at the little station.

"Do we go down?"

"Sure! We want them to know it's really us."

The earth approaches. The train grows larger.

"Go to it, old chap! Do your prettiest!"

The biplane noses up, makes a loop, then glides easily on one wing. They see handkerchiefs and hats waving along the length of the train.

"I say, Chignole, they're in the fourth car, aren't they?"

No answer.

"You might speak when you're spoken to."

Papa Charles looks round, but sees Chignole's feet where his face should be, for he is lying flat on his stomach in the cockpit, his head hidden among the cylinders.

"What's happened?"

Chignole comes to his knees, his nose sniffing the air uneasily. "It may be only a notion, but it smells like something burning."

The words are not out of his mouth when a white jet of flame spurts from the engine and licks at the upper plane.

Fire! Their throats contract, their eyes start, their hands clench. Fire! A vision of horror, wakened by memories! Fire! To fall like a torch!—to explode like a comet! Fire! Comrades roasted; the flames contending for them in the midst of charred rubbish, with the oil and the burning petrol pouring over them, from the staved-in tanks. Fire! Fire!

Papa Charles plays his last trick. He closes the petrol and blocks the gas throttle to the last notch, trying in this way by a

violent inhalation, at one breath to exhaust the petrol from the cylinders and to hinder the fire.

"Nothing doing. It's a rubber pipe for carrying the oil that has slipped; and the exhaust has fired it."

The flame, waving and spreading nimbly, licks the flippers and the elevator, whose linen is beginning to peel off. Papa Charles prefers a smash to a bonfire. He pushes the rudder-bar as far to one side as it will go and pushes the control-stick to the opposite side. There is a glissade, the biplane drops over the wood like a meteor. There is a crash, an explosion, a series of bumps; then—silence.

Papa Charles opens his eyes, which he had closed in terror. He is astride the upper branch of a pine. Beside him, Chignole, suspended by the slack of his trousers, waggles his arms and legs as if swimming. Below them, their machine is burning up.

"Well!—She flew!"

"Ah, Papa Charles, now I know there's a good God!"

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On the station platform, after a moment of stupor, the travellers gaze compassionately at the Bassinets. "Mama" Chignole and Madame Bassinet have put aside their own grief to care for Sophie whose fixed eyes betray her anguish of mind. M. Fondu turns his hat in his hand and murmurs disconnected words. M. Bassinet had cursed high heaven, but now he is weeping heavily, noisily, as men weep who are unused to tears.

"All aboard! All aboard! No one can stay here! Military territory!" cry the military police.

They get back into their compartments mechanically, like herded cattle. But while the train puffs, an automobile comes up with a rush. Flagada is driving, and beside him Frangipane, standing up, crazy with joy, flourishes his hat.

"They're all right! They're saved!"

Everybody embraces everybody else, and M. Bassinet, with tears still undried, begins to scold his party.

"What's the matter with you. I told you they'd come out right side up."

"Yes, yes; how foolish of us to cry!" sobs M. Fondu.

III

EXIT FLAGADA

I. CHIGNOLE TO THE RESCUE

GILDED insects danced in the sunbeams that filtered through the pine needles. A bee heavy with pollen plunged deep into a flower-cup, setting the blossom a-nod on its delicate stem. Papa Charles and Flagada were asleep on the damp hot sand, with their caps over their faces to keep out the light. Frangipane, bare-headed, was doing his hundred paces "as at Deauville." Chignole, lying on his stomach, propped on one elbow, drew cabalistic signs with the end of his hazel switch. The high notes of a distant clarion woke the sleepers.

"That's not for us. It's the assembly for

the machine-gun rookies. You can go on napping, Papa Charles."

"You think——" yawned Flagada.

"This place gets my goat! I feel as if I were at the movies! Who would have supposed that in one day we should be blown from the front to the extreme rear—from Nancy to the School of Aërial Gunnery, at Cazau, in the Gironde!"

"The surprises of a military life."

"Oh, what a place! What a change from out yonder! It turns this month's practice into a sort of holiday, a shooting leave."

The wind, very soft, stirred the spicy fragrance of fresh pine gum and dried heather, mingled with the sharp, salty smell of the neighbouring sea. The aviators, accustomed to the harsh climate of the Vosges, revelled in the happy languor of their deliciously sleepy senses.

"Sunday, if we're free, I'll take you to Cap-Ferret," said Frangipane. "I know a place there where the oysters are a marvel.

We'll hire a little boat, and if there's time, we'll go down to the ocean."

"At last I shall see the sea!" Chignole heaved a sigh of satisfaction.

"And at Cannes, at Nice, when you were in hospital, I suppose it was the Seine that you saw from the beach?"

"You think you're funny!" Chignole shrugged his shoulders. "Well, yes; I insist; that's not really the sea, that Mediterranean! It's blue! It might be the sky. And flat! Oh, it was so still it got on my nerves."

"Here's somebody else complaining that the sea's too beautiful."

In single file, along the narrow footpath, they made their way toward the School. Chignole loitered, picking green mulberries and scratching his hands on brambles to gather the honeysuckle whose vines overran the thicket. He gazed with astonished eyes at all this nature spread out before him, for it was new to him; but he did not enjoy confessing his own ignorance and discovering how like he was to everybody else.

At the wharf near which the hydroplanes were docked they found the machines resting on the flat, shining surface of the pond like birds which had forgotten to close their white wings. Papa Charles was assigned to one as pilot; Chignole practised bursting target-balloons with a machine gun fitted with a new kind of collimator.

"Hi, old son! This isn't our old family *Voisin!* It's the hen-coop, the Maurice Farman, the M. F."*

In the cockpit the places were reversed. Chignole, in front, turned the gun on its tripod to test its field of fire. Papa Charles, behind him, was getting used to the new controls. The rudder-bar was replaced by pedals, and the joy-stick by a horizontal bar with handles.

When the screw was cranked, the biplane slid, at a slow pace, on her pontoons and left the dock. Papa Charles gave her the gas and pulled the control imperceptibly toward him; the wing pontoons left the water; the tail

*Pronounced Mèfe.

pontoons brushed the surface a moment then left it.

"She's off!"

"Not bad sport, playing we're ducks."

As they went up, they could see below them the pond, like molten metal, ringed round by the unbroken green of the heath. On the right, a narrow isthmus of gray downs and the infinite ocean; before them, another pond, the one near Biscarrosse and Parentis; on the left, the pine forest, dotted with glades in which were hidden the low hovels of the rosin gatherers. A quiet, sleepy panorama. Chignole, contemplating it, understood perhaps for the first time that although he was fighting for France, for a principle, he was also fighting for himself. At Nancy, he had flown over houses, factories, each one with its owner; the trenches belonged to no one; Lorraine was still in the enemy's hands. Then, he had been fighting to keep or to get back things which didn't belong to him personally, and never would. But this forest, this heath, these blossomy fields, all this

belonged to every Frenchman, this was his own; here he had his share in earth and water and sunshine; here he had his share in liberty and happiness, and all of a sudden, he—the Chignole without a penny to his name—seemed to himself immensely rich.

"And all that might be taken by the Boches, or come under Boche rule! Ah ha! William, you old bandit, you want too much! Varmint!" And to appease his wrath he fired furiously at the balloons.

"I say!—this side; do you see it?—the sea." It glittered like a silver breastplate, yet its soft, silky folds clung to the curves of the coast, crept into the coves, hooded the capes, twined round the islands. Papa Charles, hypnotized by the deep roar of the machine alive to his whim, and drunk with the azure and the wind, had foolish longings to head toward the dim line that marked the meeting of sky and water.

"Are you bound for America?" Chignole inquired, surprised at the direction of the machine.

Papa Charles, brought back to reality, pressed upon one of the pedals. The docile biplane obeyed, skirted the coast, and entered the bay of Arcachon. The sand banks cast brown shadows into the transparent water. Along the shores, villas nestled, lost in the mimosas and the fig trees, and protected by palisades and thick walls. Papa Charles recalled the town of the winter before the war, the sad shadows of consumptives in bright-coloured woollens which accented their leanness and their pallor; the look of hopeless illness lurking in every eye, exhaling at every breath. Oh, better far this death he faced, this death he chose to die, than that other awaiting behind the disease which consumes the lungs, taints the blood, brands the flesh. At least, when he died, he would go out in health—whole, strong, and beautiful.

Chignole was still looking through his field glasses.

"What are you hunting for?"

"They're always talking about the oysters

of Arcachon; I'm looking to see if I can see any."

Suddenly the sun disappeared behind a bank of dark clouds; the wind freshened. Papa Charles turned the plane and dived toward Cazau at full speed. Black balls were climbing the halyards of the semaphore. The pond was crinkling into a thousand wrinkles.

"That means a squall—Shall we have time to dock before it catches us?"

The farther down they came, the rougher the waves looked. Papa Charles nosed up to steady the machine; as he lighted, the pontoon of one wing was hooked by a reed; the biplane spun on its nose and turned completely over, tipping out its passengers. Chignole found himself at the bottom of the pond.

"Here you are! Ho, for a life preserver. I sha'n't miss a thing in this war!" Striking out from the thigh, he rose to the surface, and seized hold of a sort of shapeless rag that swept through his fingers. He pulled

it to him just as it was vanishing. It was the hair of Papa Charles, half-drowned already and about to go down.

In the motor boat manned by Frangipane and Flagada, which was the first to arrive at the scene of the accident, Papa Charles came to his senses, thanks to the vigorous measures of Chignole who almost pulled out his tongue, under the pretext of restoring his circulation.

"It's worth while having hair, Papa Charles —what! If you'd been bald, you'd be at the bottom now!"

II. CHIGNOLE HAS THE BLUES

Chignole and Flagada left the office of the sergeant-major, caps tilted on one ear, each waving a piece of paper.

"Here you are! Leave! Twenty-four hours granted for family affairs. The Cap'n fell for it."

"Flagada!"

Papa Charles and Frangipane regarded the toes of their boots with gloom, and sighed dolefully.

"No, but joking aside," Chignole continued, "do you really think we'd leave you out?—that Flagada and I would go on a bat to Bordeaux without you? Not on your life! The question is how to work it."

"The secret session is open; let us deliberate," announced Papa Charles, pompously.

Seated on the sand, they wasted no thought upon the magic of the rosy hour which was setting the pines ablaze and the pond a-sparkle, but industriously searched their wits for some scheme clever enough to bring them a free day.

"I advise prudence," Frangipane warned them lightly, "for they have their eye on us."

Chignole sucked long on a piece of grass plucked from the edge of a ditch, scratched the earth, sniffed, then made up his mind:

"It's not worth while looking for noon at two o'clock. The stunt is to hump ourselves so we sha'n't miss the ten o'clock train. You must look pale; the doctor will excuse you from service, that's the main thing.

Nobody'll come snooping round our quarters to see if we're there, and we'll vanish."

Papa Charles and Frangipane turned their steps toward the infirmary. The head surgeon was a suspicious, asthmatic old man who saw in every aviator a dangerous rival in the affections of the little chambermaids of the Hotel de la Gare, and an incorrigible idler. Hence, he fixed the two cronies with an inquisitorial eyeglass.

Papa Charles, completely master of himself, enumerated his wounds "which the sea air irritated," and described his falls with the detail of a newspaper reporter filling a column. His voice trembled; he was overcome; he was on the verge of tears. The Major stopped him, convinced.

But Frangipane came up with his habitual swagger and his quizzical smile, and the countenance of his interlocutor darkened at once.

"What's the matter with you?"

"Heavens, Doctor, how should I know? To be quite frank, there are no symptoms of

acute illness; it's a general discomfort, which seems to call for sick leave." And to carry conviction, he put out his tongue which he had previously rubbed with chalk.

The doctor saw through the ruse, but the *Croix de Guerre* made an impression on him. He wanted to show that he was a good sort, but nobody's fool.

"Sick leave granted, but I prescribe a purge for you; you know as well as I do why your tongue is coated—coated white. Don't go yet. Orderly; castor oil. Wait! Wait! I'm going to give it to you myself."

The wretch, horror-struck, swallowed a full glass, rolling the whites of his eyes, while the doctor emitted sharp little grunts—his way of laughing.

An hour later the express bore them away. Frangipane, livid, collapsed in a corner, one hand on his stomach.

A good breakfast in Bordeaux set him on his feet. Arm in arm, like sailors ashore, the gay fellows strolled along the quays smoking huge cigars which the proprietor

of the restaurant, won by their charm, had insisted upon bestowing on them.

The Port—Shops where all sorts of things, which Chignole had never seen before, were sold. Buoys, rigging, oiled hats. Dark public houses smelling of tar and alcohol. Strange, tough-skinned characters with innocent eyes and evil mouths. A great river, a forest of masts, chimneys, and cranes. And that atmosphere peculiar to maritime cities, swept by the wind of perpetual departures into the unknown.

They stopped short before the poster of a music-hall.

SKY-LIFE!
Grand Review in two acts and thirty tableaux.

"'Sky-life!'—It's about aviation!"

"To-day's Sunday; there's a matinee; our presence here is plainly indicated."

Their entrance into a proscenium box caused a lively sensation. They were good to look at, our aces, with their fantastic

uniforms, their decorations, and their chevrons. The people at Bordeaux don't often have aviators within their walls, so they were the object of noisy and affectionate curiosity.

"How well set up they are!"

"Have they palms?"

"Poor young men! Still, we mustn't spoil them too much."

Proud of their success, they swaggered. Chignole could not capture enough smiles and little attentions. Flagada realized that he had never awakened such enthusiasm as a comedian. Frangipane, the aristocrat, acknowledged that "the people" have some good in them. Papa Charles, though really touched, feigned indifference; it was more distinguished.

At the finale, a lively old lady threw them a bouquet with a flourish. This let loose a regular ovation. The Marseillaise; flowers; they were borne off in triumph. In the lobby there were speeches, champagne, embraces. Ah, the Midi!

Later, on a bench in the park, their lightheadedness evaporated little by little. They

had tasted the strong wine of popularity, and they came to their senses ashamed of their silly intoxication.

Ah! behind the lines!—the poor joys of the rear, ignoble when they are not empty. Their thoughts reverted to their comrades going upon patrol at the front, in a stormy sky, at that marvellous sport, aërial war, whose motto is: "Thrills—then carry on—and keep grinning."

Meanwhile, each one was feeling anew the slow grip of the thousand and one ties of his life, which the war had strained but not broken, and which the briefest return to the rear tightened again.

Frangipane saw once more the cradle of his race in Beaugency, crowned by the old feudal tower whose scars were hidden by lichen. His ancestors, small provincial nobles, had gone out from it to secure posts at court:

Orléans, Beaugency,
Notre-Dame de Cléry,
Vendôme—Vendôme.

The popular refrain of romantic comedy hummed in his ears.

Flagada felt once again the obsession of the theatre, the boards, the auditorium. He seemed to breathe the stale smell of the wings, the mouldiness and paint; he grew sentimental thinking how ridiculously he used to dress to play the part of a solemn necromancer.

Papa Charles mused on his existence before the war: flirtations and the tango, winters at Davos, springs at Cairo, summers at Cabourg and autumns at Ravenna. Bobsleighs, latticed windows, tennis, and the mandolin. His dream called up profiles, silhouettes; hair in caressing curls, eyes that promised, hands that beckoned. Now that he looked back upon himself through the perspective of time, whose worth he should understand henceforth, he could see how he might surround himself with a voluptuous and soft life of visions and rare sensations. Ah, how he could dream, love, and be beloved, if he were sure of not dying!

And Chignole's thoughts turned to Sophie.

He tried to struggle against the spell, for well he knew that if he once allowed the image of his wife to come between him and his duty, he could never fully accomplish it, try as he might. A true priest knows only his God; a true soldier should know only his country. But in fulfilling the priestly office, is it possible to strip off the human envelope entirely—to set aside one's personality, one's ego, completely—for the sake of an idea, however beautiful?

The four friends—so different in intellectual quality, in physical inheritance, in social contacts—were gripped by the same anguish, and Chignole summed up their trouble when he said:

"I don't know what's the matter with me—it's a bore like everything else—but I want to cry."

III. MONSIEUR BASSINET PRACTISES PENMANSHIP

In his shirt-sleeves, seated at the oilcloth-covered table in the porter's lodge, M. Bassi-

net traced capital letters in a copybook, drawing his inspiration from the copy set at the left of the page. It was hard work for him; he was not very clever at it; the veins in his forehead were swollen and his fingers were stained with ink.

The tiny kitchen was entirely filled with Madame Bassinet who was scouring the bottom of a saucepan which she held pressed against her stomach. "Mama Chignole" was sitting near the open window, using the last moments of daylight to begin—or to finish, one never knew which—her customary knitting. M. Fondu slept over his newspaper. Sophie was sweeping up the crumbs from the evening meal.

"Move a little, Papa, so I can take up what's under your feet."

"Don't bother me, little daughter, I'm engaged in serious work."

"Serious indeed!" snorted Madame Bassinet, edging sideways from among her pots and kettles. "At your age!—Nothing better to do than to make pothooks."

"Ma'me Bassinet, to master a subject one must begin at the beginning,"

"And what good will it do you? Will your customers tip you better because you can draw a circle?"

"A beautiful handwriting is always worth while," M. Fondu felt called upon to point out, stirred by the discussion.

"It's better than going to the saloon," smiled "Mama Chignole."

But Madame Bassinet would have the last word:

"Are you putting yourself to this trouble to write to your lady friends, your chorus girls? If ever I catch you——" She brandished her saucepan like a club.

"Oh! Ma'me Bassinet! To think me capable of—— Oh!" stammered the good man, overwhelmed by such a suspicion. And, in his flutter, he upset the ink bottle.

"There you go! Isn't that the limit! Get up, quick!—before you spot your trousers!"

The arrival of the postman put a stop to

the recriminations. Sophie examined the letters feverishly; then—disappointed, distressed, anxious—cried: "Nothing—still nothing."

"It's a long time," added "Mama Chignole," "a long time."

The two women looked at each other timidly, then their eyes went to the picture of Chignole, in the place of honour, over the mantelpiece. The young woman kept back her tears so as not to make the old one cry.

"What a dirty war it is!" grumbled Madame Bassinet, who, this evening, had no playful thoughts.

"Oh, do shut up!" retorted M. Bassinet. "Everybody to his taste, what! Funereal airs, and a little sob party just because there are no letters from the boy! Do you think that he can be always hatching nonsense? You saw him five days ago, when he came back from Cazau with his boss; doesn't that satisfy you? Do let him breathe. What the devil!——"

"Yes, but he went back to Nancy to take part in a big raid."

"It's not the first. Why shouldn't he have his usual luck? You'll end by making him ashamed with those Lenten faces of yours; won't they, Fondu?"

According to his custom, M. Fondu contented himself with a silent laugh, and then gazed peacefully at his little finger nail which had been broken during the bombardment, but was slowly growing again.

M. Bassinet continued his writing under the lamp now lighted. He was furious at feeling this unhappiness around him, but surprised that he could not find more emphatic words to condemn it.

"Why do I try to argue the impossible? I should make more impression on them if I smashed a piece of china. Ah, these women!" —But why was he embarrassed in their presence? Because he was a man, and at home, while others were at the front. Of course, they didn't want him; he was an old man. The most exacting could have nothing

against him; still in women's eyes he read scorn of his weakness, his age. He could no longer speak as a man; he had no more authority. Opinions were tolerated only from men who could fight.

The summer night, thundery and hot, excited Sophie a little. She shivered over her memories. Oh, doubt!—uncertainty!—to tremble every time the bell rang! To long for the postman and to dread his coming; to search the faces of those who might know something, for a betrayal of the truth; to listen to the clock, whose tic-tac fell upon the silence drop by drop, like tears or blood. "I love him, I love him; and we are separated! I need him, to be happy. Oh, to feel his gentle strength once more. If he should be dying!—if he should be dead!" Her dream turned to a nightmare. Her hands clutched at a fleeing shape. How alone she was—already; like a widow!

Madame Bassinet tried to drown her boredom in her dishwater. She had changed a good deal since Sophie's marriage. Before,

she had had no one in the war; now she had her son-in-law. Suppose he didn't come back? What would become of her daughter, without her husband? It was all very well to say that it was for France, that the conflict had not been sought but had to be carried on; her little special interests, her maternal egoism were stronger at times than her patriotism.

M. Fondu detested this war which he had never understood. At his office, plunged in dusty accounts, separated from the world by the barricade of his ledgers, he forgot it. But as soon as he was in the street, he was compelled to recall it; and with what bitterness! His autobus was gone; his crossing was changed; his special tobacco, too wet, was ground less fine; his newspaper had only one sheet. To conclude; the incidents on his journey to Nancy had made a lively impression on him. He went to bed in his clothes, with his savings under the bolster, and the horn of an automobile was enough to send him post haste under the bed, for he always

mistook it for the siren announcing the zeppelins.

"I have only him—I have only him," thought "Mama Chignole." "What would the future hold for me if he should be taken?" She dwelt in imagination upon her solitary and wretched old age with its two possible endings: the almshouse or the bitter bread of charity.

It was a dull and empty time. Discouragement and doubt gripped them. But suddenly, on the first floor, a nasal phonograph began:

Allons, enfants de la Patrie!
Le jour de gloire est arrivé——

The stirring music awakened their benumbed senses, drove out materialism and set free the ideal.

Contre nous de la tyrannie,
L'étendard sanglant est levé!——

In the echoing depths of their hearts it vibrated, swelled, and spread through all their being till they felt suffocated.

M. Bassinet rose. In the wardrobe, from under a pile of napkins, he brought out a beautiful red account book with gilt edges:

"This is why I am learning to write all over again." And he inscribed at the top of the first page: "To-day, I begin, for my grandchildren, my *mémoires* of the Great War."

Aux armes ! citoyens !
Formez vos bataillons !——

It seemed to them that it was Chignole—there on the wall, sitting in his frame—who was singing the Marseillaise to them.

IV. CHIGNOLE JUST GETS BY

The plateau was deserted, for the sun blazed at the zenith, and the dry grass was like tinder. The closed mess halls were empty; the mechanics slept in the shade of the hangars, and the personnel of the flying corps swung in hammocks under the pines.

A lonely aëroplane was on the field. Chig-

nole, in his cockpit, was correcting the hang of the compass, held by coil-springs stretched on hooks. Mimile, in his blue overalls, was putting grease with a spatula in the necks of the pulleys over which the controls slip. Papa Charles, sheltered under one of the wings, played solitaire.

"Is there luck in the cards?"

"Yes; four aces, victory. I don't insist, Chignole, and above all I wouldn't hinder you; but don't you think we'd be better off in the wood?"

"My! but you're a lazy lummox! There you sit with nothing to do but shuffle your cards; and you complain! To hear you, nobody'd think that to-night we were to bomb Trèves."

"Are you nervous?"

"But my dear fellow, it's some joy-ride, that burg! Two hundred and sixty kilometres there and back, as the crow flies; which means four hundred with the zigzags. We mustn't let the mill get rheumatism. Hi, Mimile!—what are you up to? Look-

ing for short-circuits in the exhaust-chamber?"

"I am regulating the breaking of the current."

"Happy thought!" And he added to Papa Charles in a low voice, "Really, Mimile is a good fellow; only he was picked green—what?"

Absorbed in his job, he stopped talking and set to work with his tools and his clever hands to finish what he had begun. But presently he stopped, wiped his forehead, and made a magnificent gesture:

"No! It can't be done. There's no way of regulating this compass like that. The needle varies two degrees whenever I push the control over to that side. Let's put the cuckoo on the table. Then it'll be as easy as falling off a log."

They rolled the machine to the table where the cardinal points were drawn with lime on the ground, and compensated the errors of the compass by adding metal weights.

"With the load we must carry to-night,

we shall weigh almost a kilo. A regular autobus—what?"

* * * * * * *

The mess after dinner.—Coffee, liqueurs, pipes, and cigarettes.

"Departure: eleven o'clock," said the secretary, turning from the telephone.

In the face of danger, everyone behaved in character. Some wrote last letters, others studied the maps. Frangipane, at the piano, sang a Venetian barcarolle, under his breath:

Gentille gondolière
Dit le pêcheur épris,
Je cède à ta prière.
Quel en sera le prix?——

Flagada repeated the monologue of Charles V. The vaudeville artist, even as he faced the enemy, had not given up hope of entering the trrragedy class at the Conservatory.

Papa Charles made a methodical inventory of the contents of his pockets and destroyed personal papers. Chignole filled a thermos

bottle with a hot, spicy beverage: "The nights are sharp, even in June; and besides, I don't want to go thirsty."

Watches were feverishly consulted, and to cheat suspense, they fell asleep, all dressed, on the seat-straps. The hours passed. A motor crossed the plateau, bringing the report from the meteorological station at Headquarters. Officers' automobiles went out through the by-way of Pixérécourt. Dogs barked themselves hoarse; beacons opened their fans of spreading light on the ground; engines began to revolve; there were short commands, a group around the Captain, suggestions:

"Two squads, you understand? One to follow the Moselle, the other the Sarre; rendezvous where they join. Have the observers the call-signal for the return trip? Attention: every airplane which fails to give it, will be fired on by our anti-aircraft batteries, to prevent the Boches from crossing our lines with us. Forward!"

Chignole and Papa Charles, with belts

buckled, waited their turn patiently. Mimile would have liked to say something affectionate, but he was afraid of being snubbed by his heroes.

A biplane rose, turned; then, with lights lit, came back over them at ten metres. It was Frangipane and Flagada who had the honour of leaving at the head of the second group, and were moving off toward Château-Salins.

"Go to it, old chap!"

They wheeled; there was a brief moment of anxiety; the biplane was so heavy with petrol and explosives that it seemed unable to leave the earth; and the wood was in their way like a wall. A sharp blow on the joy-stick, and they nose up, just miss the wood, pitch heavily. Is it going to be a slide? No; Papa Charles lifts his hand at once, taking advantage of the hollow of Agincourt to dive and get his equilibrium, while increasing his speed.

"Stay over the parade ground till we're up a thousand metres; if there's a breakdown,

the cherry trees of Malzéville will be unhealthy."

"We should worry! I don't want to crowd the fellows who are just starting out," and they flew over Champigneulles at a low altitude.

It was a slow ascent, with abrupt rushes of air robbing them in an instant of a hundred metres painfully achieved.

"Pont-à-Mousson——"

"Nine hundred. Climb still a little more."

"I'll be d—— Just enough petrol."

There followed searchlights and cannonading, but they were rejoined by their comrades; and the Boches, surprised at their numbers, fumbled their aim and their shots.

"Do we follow the Moselle?"

"Not yet. Better avoid Metz."

They held to the left and tried to catch the river again, high above Thionville, but a thick mist covered the valley. They had to choose; either to be seen and see where they were going; or to hide in the fog, and be blind.

"I don't like muck; it gives me a cold," declared Chignole, wrapping his muffler over his mouth.

"Well, open your eye, for they're going to get after us. Don't look at the route, but see what they're letting off."

On the ground, wandering gleams betrayed the shots; then caterpillars began to rise. The "caterpillar" is a subtle Teutonic invention composed of a series of little incandescent balloons whose crimes are of two kinds: if they touch a plane, they set it afire; and secondly, the iron wires stretched from one balloon to the other smash the propeller if it becomes entangled in their network. Therefore despite the lure of their poetical appearance—rose-colour and green—our friends prudently avoided them.

"Oiling her up?"

"Yiss, miludd!"

The biplane gradually increased her altitude until Papa Charles, judging it sufficient, pressed on the control, thus gaining ten kilometres an hour. Before them, on

the right, flashes zigzagged through the clouds.

"There's a thunderstorm."

"Not a bit. That's the guys of the second squad, getting it in the neck; another proof we're on the right road."

"Keep your eyes skinned; they're flying with lights out; look out for collisions."

Are Flagada and Frangipane among them? Does fortune favour them?

As if in reply to their unspoken questions, a machine, with lamps and beacons alight, crossed their path.

"Nobody but those two would be such fools just here——"

"Except us."

Chignole turned the switches.

"They'll spot us. It's idiotic——"

"Perhaps; but that'll give them a jolt!"

They descended. Lights pricked the darkness; long, bright oblongs marked the factory buildings at work. They longed to drop bombs on them, but orders were: Reprisals. The city is to be punished.

It came into view like a black hole, in the glass at the bottom of the cockpit. The airplanes had already begun their work, for yellow streaks were streaming over its surface, and expanding into reddish blots. Chignole pulled the levers toward him with evident satisfaction.

"Good-night!" he shouted at the earth.

A loop, and back they came again. Chignole opened the cock of the spirit indicator. The graduated tube was still half full of petrol.

"She's holding out!"

"I don't want to give her too much to do."

Papa Charles reduced his speed, adjusted his direction by the compass, and got ready for a bite of lunch, at his companion's invitation: Crackers, cakes of chocolate, and several swallows of grog still hot from the thermos bottle. Their comrades passed by them and disappeared.

"They're in a hurry to get to bed; we've got all the time there is——"

Shells encircled them, but at a distance.

Chignole declared that this evening the Huns had their uses.

"The lines! Ouf!" They smiled at having once again escaped a mishap.

Then, suddenly, a French searchlight transfixed them, and was turned on and off at regular intervals.

"Don't you see they're asking you for the signal? Why don't you give it?"

"The letter! The letter!——" stammered Chignole.

The searchlight repeated its signal, but rapidly, jerkily; they guessed that it was astonished at having no reply.

"The letter! The letter! I can't remember it!"

A shot—at fifty metres.

"The 75!—there she goes!"

Papa Charles turned round, took hold of Chignole's arms, and shook them. "Think! We're done for!"

Chignole strained every nerve and concentrated his thoughts to rouse his memory.

"Wake up, old son! What letter?" Papa

Charles bent over as if to pluck it out of him.

The shells were now harrying the machine at close quarters. Chignole no longer struggled. With haggard face he awaited the explosion—Death.

Death—the end of everything—of his love—and more—of Sophie; Sophie—the dear name was there, before his eyes, printed in letters of fire.

Then, as a mysterious clic reveals a secret hiding place, suddenly, a compartment opened in his brain: Sophie—S!—the first letter of her name was also the letter of deliverance, and with a choking voice he hurled it at the death which he could defeat yet once again.

"S! — S!— Papa Charles! — S! I've found——!"

V. FLAGADA MISSES HIS EXIT

"Anybody'd know you were a freak, to catch the grippe in June!"

"And then, to climb to two thousand with-

out your old horse jacket. You really ought to be smacked."

Flagada was stretched on a bed in the mess-room, and despite the mild weather and the furs which covered him, he could not get warm.

"We're going to put a mustard plaster on you, as the doctor ordered."

"A mustard plaster! It's the doctor's joke! Me, I know a trick worth two of that!" cried Chignole, coming from the kitchen with a cup in his hand. "You're going to taste this concoction of mine, Flagada, old son. Hot wine, according to the Bassinet recipe; table-claret, rum, sugar, lemon, pepper, clove, stewed together and served piping hot. You swallow, you sweat, and to-morrow—you're on your feet again!"

Bssi—Poum—in rapid succession.

"The Boches! They can't leave us in peace."

"The escadrille is called out! Get your machines!"

"I'm going to get up." Flagada threw

off his covers, but before he could put his foot to the ground, Chignole's fist had nailed him to the mattress.

"Do you want to catch your death? The Cap'n understands. You're excused. All you have to do is sleep."

"Go ahead; I'll watch him. I can't go without my pilot." Frangipane sat down by his friend's pillow, after having tucked him in with a tenderness surprising in one so huge.

Papa Charles and Chignole hurried away to their biplane.

"Is it serious, this attack?"

"No; chill and fever; a heavy cold."

"Didn't you notice?—his chest wheezes ——"

"That's normal."

The messenger from Headquarters came up with a rush: "Twelve airplanes by Pont-à-Mousson and toward Toul."

Papa Charles manœuvred mechanically. He was amazed at his own calmness and indifference. Where were the shivery departures of former days?—where were the ner-

vous hands clutching the controls? Then, he had felt the exciting obsession of danger, the need of showing off, of being in the public eye, of applause at the expense of his skin; he had felt ambition to outdo others, and thirst for reward. To-day, war-weary and surfeited, he was moved simply by the ardent desire to fulfil a supreme duty. He was no longer an aviator merely to play to the gallery, attract attention, and subjugate susceptible women, but because in the struggle in midheaven he had a better chance to use his initiative than in the trenches. Before, he had fought for himself, egotistically; now, he was fighting for others, and the nobility of that disinterested duty made a bigger man of him.

* * * * * * *

Flagada was drowsy, and in his fever dreamed: He was in a great raid; the goal had been attained; at the frontier there was a barrage, a fight with a Fokker. Frangipane fired, the enemy plane descended in flames, after having tipped out its passengers who

spun round in the void. He returned to the escadrille. He was cited. *Bssi—Poum.* Champagne! Leave! Paris! Café du Globe. Old theatrical friends. *Bssi—Poum.* Champagne. How much a man could drink in a dream!

The last cork popped so loud that he woke with a start. Frangipane, at a window, seemed to be keenly interested in something going on outside.

Bssi—Poum. Was his dream beginning again? No; those were signal rockets.

The secretary came in and spoke to Frangipane: "What do you think? Those pigs have taken advantage of our machines being up, to come over Nancy. A Hun has been sighted in the direction of the forest of Parroy, and there's no one to stop him."

"Have you warned Saint-Nicolas-du-Port and Lunéville?"

"Sure! But it's no good. While one squad went over, on their way to Toul, with our men at their heels, another slipped toward the Vosges, pursued from Lunéville. Saint-

Nicolas is regulating the artillery, so our corner is stripped; not for long, of course, but long enough to get the drop on Nancy."

"What rotten luck!" muttered Frangipane, wrathfully. And just then he felt a touch on his shoulder and turned round.

Flagada had risen—had put on his leather suit without a sound; and now, as he wound his muffler round his neck, he said quite simply: "We're going."

Frangipane, stupefied, tried to stop him, but he had already leaped through the doorway and was making for the hangar at a jerky but rapid pace.

The group of mechanics jumped at the sound of his whistle. They would have helped him climb into the cockpit, but he pushed them off.

"No; don't bother; I can do it alone."

He examined his controls, buckled himself in, emptied a flask of spirit at a gulp, and turned round upon his partner, who had followed him:

"Ready?"

"You're not such an ass as to fly in this condition."

"I'll go without you, if you're afraid to come with me."

"That's not the question."

"Then save your breath."

So they set off.

During the first few minutes, Frangipane anxiously watched his pilot's manœuvres; but they were so normal that he soon paid no more attention to them and occupied himself exclusively with the adversary.

A thousand metres overhead, the dihedral of the Hun's dark wings was stamped sharply upon the pale blue sky. Flagada dived toward the lines to get his bearings, then rose, veered, and returned upon his enemy to attack him from behind. The Boche, surprised at finding a French plane, abandoned his goal for the moment and stole away to the left; but a squad appeared in the distance, making for him at full speed. He turned short round and made a feint to the right; but the other squad was coming back from Toul. If he

delayed, he would be caught in a pair of tongs, whose hinge was the biplane chasing him.

"He's ours!" Frangipane exulted. With his forefinger on the trigger of the Lewis, he waited for the psychological moment when the Boche would be framed in his collimator. But their machine, deprived of guidance, lurched abruptly. Flagada had let go the joy-stick. His body had fallen over backward and his head bumped against the support of the machine gun. Still, he had not fainted; with one hand clutching his throat he tried to pluck off the invisible noose that was strangling him.

"I'm choking!—choking!"

Congestion had seized him. Frangipane, beside himself with fright, tried to loosen his collar, but Flagada would not give up: "No; let me save you. I must save you." He seized the joy-stick with a superhuman effort: "Now—next thing—tie my hands to it; I can't hold on if you don't."

Frangipane obeyed, with a handkerchief.

"Cut off the gas.—Good!—I can't see any more—— What's the altitude?"

Frangipane supported his companion's shoulders. With eyes fixed on the altimetre, he told him the height; and the dying blind man, rattling in his throat, with hands bound to the steering gear, used his last strength to bring his bird and his passenger home alive.

* * * * * * *

The walls of the court of honour were covered with climbing roses, which shed their petals at the lightest breeze. From the worn gullets of two stone lions thin threads of water trickled, and sang as they fell into a shallow round basin carpeted with thick, starry moss. The geraniums in the box-bordered garden plot spread like a pool of blood upon the lawn. At the wide-open windows the wounded showed their thin faces, lost under a cap, or hidden by a bandage.

As Papa Charles, Frangipane, and Chignole entered the portal of the hospital an unpleasant shudder ran down their spines. The

military hospital, with its sickish smell, its muffled footsteps gliding about the corridors, its plaintive rustling of bruised and protesting bodies, touched their sympathetic hearts, which dreaded suffering.

A surgeon came to meet them: "I sent for you because he has asked for you several times." He stopped a moment, then with a weary gesture: "He won't last till tomorrow. Yes; double pneumonia, with certainly infectious grippe."

An orderly added: "He is very low. He only speaks to ask what time it is; it's a very bad sign."

They entered the ward on tiptoe. A screen hid their friend's agony from the other patients, several of whom were amusing themselves playing checkers. They were standing beside him; and at the noise he opened his eyes, looked at them lingeringly, as if he did not recognize them at all, then smiled at them:

"I am very glad. I — thought — you wouldn't come."

He spoke with difficulty, panting for breath, and his hands crumpled the covers which they were clutching convulsively.

They—abashed in the presence of death—could find nothing to say.

"And the Boche—the other—day?"

"Brought down by a Spad."

"So much the better—or—worse; for it was—really ours—eh—Frangipane?"

Ether on a pad gave him momentary strength.

"This—morning—the Cap'n—gave me the medal. It's a beauty!" A tear rolled down his pinched nose. "Too bad—I can't—wear it—what? So jolly—before everybody! And that I should—make a—a mess—of it—at the end! I've missed—my last—exit."

An attendant brought in a tank of oxygen.

"And there's—my last—sausage."

They left precipitately, on the pretext of duty, but really because they could no longer keep back their tears.

When Papa Charles kissed him, Flagada whispered in an ecstatic voice: "Take a—

It was here that villagers, in chorus, bewailed the requisitions because it is the fashion to blame the Government; although, privately, they were glad of them, since they made money by them. Here, drinking bitter beer and abusing the ox-eyed maid who had to endure their scolding, they forgot their homes, so empty since their strong-armed sons had gone to the front. They forgot their wives whom grief had made more greedy and more crabbed.

This evening, as on the evenings before elections, the crowd had gathered around the people of importance:

Champommier, physician and district deputy. This unworthy graduate of the Medical School had been obliged to leave the city because of unpleasant rumours concerning his affairs, and was now trying for a deputyship in rural politics. When he let fall from his thin lips certain high-sounding socialistic formulæ, his long hungry teeth gleamed through his dirty beard. If he got a chance at the butter, there was never much left for any one else.

Next, Malinvaud, complacently lifting his enormous wine-smeared, full-moon face, above the bowl of his gross body: he was *Chevalier du Mérite Agricole;* and Mr. Mayor, the municipal judge,—to whom the rural guard and the chief of police (if not too tipsy) paid their respects.

Then, Vilardier, dry as the herrings curled round in their hogshead at the door of his grocery, waiting for customers.

"Well, Mr. Mayor, what do you plan to do to set it straight?"

"It would be a disgrace for our parish."

"I—you understand—if it happens, I shall send my boys to the Curé. So much the worse for the Republic!"

"We expected you to be more firm. You've been as soft as tripe—excuse my frankness."

The Mayor took a whiff at his pipe, and spat: "I also am annoyed at what has happened, but I am still more annoyed that my Breton cow is about to calve."

Vilardier felt that it was up to him to con-

tinue the conversation in his capacity of assistant magistrate:

"Of course, it's tiresome that they should send us, to take the place of the late Ratier, a teacher whom we don't know, but what can you do—*c'est la guerre!*" And he reflected that as sugar had gone up 5 per cent., it was quite natural that he should double the price to the consumer.

Champommier—having neither a cow about to calve, nor a business blessed with an unexpected profit, but only his patients to occupy his time (in other words, nothing of interest) approached the subject with an entirely free mind, and embraced the opportunity to hold forth:

"The central authority has saddled us with a teacher without consulting our preference. It is illegal, but let us wait before asserting ourselves."

"He's to begin to-morrow morning."

"Well, then, don't be impatient."

"In the first place, it would seem that he's an old man; and old men—I've no con-

fidence in them," this from old Marjean, nicknamed Death's Deceiver, because he was over ninety.

"They certainly might have given us somebody disabled in the war," replied Champommier. "That would have been flattering and ornamental. But what's done is done." He stroked his beard with his hairy hand, adjusted his eyeglass and gurgled forth his phrases: "We'll judge him by his work. It's by his work that the workman is judged."

Malinvaud scented the danger of letting Champommier talk too long, as he might be a serious rival at the municipal elections, so he now put in his oar:

"The council will be present at his first class, and as our district councillor has so justly observed, the workman shall be judged by his work. Besides, I'll pull his leg, as my boy says; he's full of Paris slang now that he goes to college at Châtillon-sur-Seine."

"Our Mayor'll pull his leg," the crowd

repeated, admiring the words it did not understand.

The Mayor, flattered by the sensation he had made, could not have resisted the pleasure of explaining his joke, but just then the piercing voice of his wife rang out in the yard:

"Victor!—Come quick!—The cow has calved!—Hurry! You tipsy fool!"

* * * * * * *

The little railway train puffed as it climbed the steep incline which led to the station at the end of the line. It arrived at last, but stopped so suddenly that the cars banged into each other, and a peasant who was shaken up by the collision exclaimed:

"They call that progress!"

An old man got down and hurried toward the exit as fast as he could, lugging a heavy band box.

"Is it the school you want? Straight on, as far as the church, and at the left of the square, opposite the liberty pole," replied the official who took his ticket. "That must be

the new master," he murmured, looking after him.

The old man—for, judging by his white hair, his bent shoulders, and his weary step, he was indeed an old man—took advantage of the first milestone, to sit down. He took off his felt hat, wiped his forehead, and brushed the dust from his shoes with a handful of grass. Before him, the market town rose on the hillside, its flat-roofed houses clustered round the bell tower. In the deserted yards the hot stone walls caught the sun's rays and ripened the trellised fruit-trees. Beyond, the wheat fields which were beginning to turn yellow, stood out from the dark Spanish trefoil. In the bright morning the town was attractive, and the bell which was ringing seemed to invite him graciously to make haste.

But the old man shook his head, disillusioned. Though the inanimate things might seem friendly, he knew that the people were not. He reviewed in memory his career as a country school teacher, exposed to the

insults and rebuffs of the peasants. To them, the man who does not work with his hands is a humbug, a regular good-for-nothing. He could make no headway against their instinctive hate except by becoming the secretary on the Mayor's office—the electoral agent, that is to say—and he was one of those unusual people who had not the soul of a lackey. Ah, he knew them! these villages outwardly so quiet, but really the battle-ground of all the sordid struggles of an ignorant humanity, delivered over to its worst instincts. This was a new station in his Way of the Cross, this schoolhouse, so coquettish and white; he knew it and he approached it resignedly, for such is life.

On the doorstep the women lifted their heads from the beans which they were shelling, nudged each other, and laughed behind his back.

"There he is! Our Mayor's going to pull his leg!"

He went up the steps. A bird sang in the trellis which framed a bay of the façade.

"Cui—Cui!" It was the piteous cry of a wounded bird.

He entered the schoolroom. The children stared at him curiously from their desks. The authorities were seated in full array under the chairmanship of Malinvaud, who had put on his tricoloured scarf in honour of the occasion,

After brief greetings, the Mayor climbed to the platform and addressed the audience:—

"Citizens, here is your schoolmaster, M. Tatignon, who enters upon his duties to-day."

He could go no further, for the "citizens," from five to eight years of age, burst out laughing. "Tatignon!" The citizens wriggled.

Ah, what shall he do? They will avenge themselves on him because his redoubtable predecessor chastised them to excess with an immense rod which served as a pointer in explaining the maps on the wall. The old man gazed without heart into the shining eyes fixed upon him by the wicked little beasts on watch.

The Mayor, having, by the aid of strong language, obtained an approach to silence, turned toward the victim and said with an assumption of good will:

"The Council has decided that because of circumstances you will open this first class with an address on heroism, at which the Council will be present in a body, hoping that you will fully appreciate the honour of this arrangement."

The public, in the secret, laughed in its sleeve. "That's it! Our Mayor's going to pull his leg!"

The old man blenched. It was a trap. They were trying to ridicule him, to prove how little he knew. He gathered his ideas together: Heroism—of course, there were ever so many examples: D'Assas; La Tour d'Auvergne; the sailors of the *Vengeur*. It was an easy subject, but he did not improvise easily. These hostile faces deterred him; fear paralyzed him.

Then the postman entered:

"Pardon! Excuse me, Mr. Mayor and

the company, but I bring M. Tatignon some letters which have already been here some time, as Mademoiselle Vantrouille explains. Your servant, sirs."

The old man seized the packet with a greedy gesture. The one he wanted was not there; but on one envelope a military stamp drew his attention.

"It is from his squadron, and that's not his handwriting!" He ripped it open with a horrible prescience of misfortune and skimmed through it rapidly. His lips moved. He wanted to speak, but the words would not form in his contracted throat.

"He can't pull it off," whispered Champommier.

"We're waiting on you, Master," said Malinvaud sweetly.

He drew himself up and seemed to have grown immeasurably taller. His dilated eyes shone with a strange light. The sheet of paper trembled in his fingers:

"You have asked me to speak on heroism. It is here. In the squadron they called him

Flagada. His real name was Louis Tatignon. He was my son. He has died out there."

In the trellis, the bird gave his piercing, "Cui, cui!"—then was silent.

II. PAPA CHARLES LOOKS OUT FOR HIMSELF

The machine guns were crackling at the shooting range in a hollow near Lay-Saint-Christophe. While the scorers stopped up the holes in the target, the gunners rested.

"I'll play you for cocktails with the Browning, Papa Charles; five balls. I'm in luck to-day; did you take a squint at my targets? Regular sieves they are, since the sight of my Hotchkiss was corrected. Her shooting is adorable. Come ahead. If you lose, you can take it out on Frangipane."

And Chignole invited them to go down from the hillock. But Papa Charles stopped him:

"We haven't time. I have permission from the Captain to use his car to take us to the cemetery."

The ghost of Flagada rose before them. Oh, not a terrifying ghost, gaunt and menac-

ing beneath a shroud! No; memory recalled the image of their friend under his usual aspect, sympathetic and gay, with the theatrical pose that made him so amusing. Neither Chignole (upon whom events made only fleeting impressions) nor even Frangipane (still a novice in flying) was much moved by this recollection of sad hours. But Papa Charles, who had finished his twenty-fifth month in the squadron, beheld the dolorous band of his vanished comrades pass before him. Their names crowded to his lips, and he recalled the very form under which death had overtaken each one: caught under the engine; hit by anti-aircraft guns; smashed in landing; brought down by a Hun; burned; missing. He read in their faces an almost ironical astonishment.

"Yes; I am still here."

Their hands reached out to him and their lips murmured, "It is your turn next."

Unconsciously, he gave a low groan.

"I say!—What's the matter with you?" said Chignole, nudging him.

He passed his hand over his eyes to dispel the nightmare: "Nothing. Nothing!——"

As they were getting into the automobile, Frangipane offered them cigarettes from his engraved case. Papa Charles scratched a match, held it out to his two friends and used it himself before extinguishing it, whereupon Frangipane exclaimed: "Three with the same match! That means bad luck."

Papa Charles shivered involuntarily, but recovered his coolness at once and retorted: "Ridiculous—such sayings!"

"I detest superstitions." Chignole added airily.

And the car started.

* * * * * * *

"Do you think you'll know how to fly in the daytime, now that we've been playing the owl so long?—Ah, old man—we've got a fine spin in prospect! I'm delighted with the objective! What sport to drop these on them——"

Chignole, with Frangipane helping him, was setting the bombs carefully in their racks.

Papa Charles, seated on the edge of the cockpit, was watching the oscillations of the needle of the speed-indicator, while Mimile looked to the oiling.

"What's the matter with the mill to-day? —only 1,000, 1,050 revolutions?"

"I don't understand it at all, Papa Charles, it's less than a week since the valves were ground. We need a new one—that's the trouble."

Chignole tested each cylinder, listened carefully, then with a half-satisfied grimace added: "It might go better, but there's nothing to worry about. In the air it will increase by at least one hundred revolutions."

Frangipane, who was staying below, as he no longer had a pilot, watched them start, uneasily. After several pick-ups, the biplane tried to rise, but fell back; at last, helped by the steepness of the flying field, the wheels left the earth and the machine got its equilibrium at a low altitude, after balancing first on one wing, then on the other.

"She's heating up all right." And Papa

Charles took his way nonchalantly toward the directing station of the 75's, to watch their evolutions through the glass.

"It won't climb! We got off because it's the fashion!" Papa Charles struck the altimeter with his fist.

"Don't get excited. You'll ruin your disposition, and do no good."

"Look at the others."

Above them, their comrades were climbing easily. He tried all the manœuvres which usually help climbing, but because the machine side-slipped, he nosed down, thus losing height. There were the trenches already. The Captain's rocket made a gray streak in the clear atmosphere. Papa Charles tried hard to rejoin the squad, but Chignole protested vigorously.

"Do you want to annihilate us?—1,000 metres! No, my friend! That's not aviation, it's suicide!"

Papa Charles turned unwillingly, reduced the speed, descended, landed, and said curtly:

"Put up the taxi. Turn the mill upside

down and see what it has in its belly." Then, addressing Frangipane who had run up for news: "It's disgusting! The first time I ever came back without reaching my goal."

As the mechanics rolled the biplane toward the hangar and he steered it by the rudder, he heard one of them say very distinctly:

"Papa Charles won't go up again."

And another voice added:

"He must take care of himself for the sake of his lady-love."

Papa Charles turned pale, and set his teeth, then he said brusquely:

"Stop! Turn her into the wind. Get out, Chignole, without your weight I can go up."

And before Chignole and Frangipane could prevent him, he had put the gas on full, and pulled the joy-stick to him. The machine made a deep zoum to get a clear line of flight once more.

Chignole drew Frangipane aside: "Did you hear what one of those guys said?"

"Yes; some mechanic—jealous."

"Do you know which it was?"

"No."

"So much the better for him. If anything happens to Papa Charles—I shall kill him. He's a murderer."

* * * * * * *

Lightened of his load, Papa Charles flew toward the lines, increasing his altitude as he flew. The rotation speed of his engine did not improve, but the decrease was not marked. That was a good sign, and he hummed a fox trot which recalled happy hours. He was glad of his decision. His companions would be much astonished at his fantastic departure, and the slanderous tongue would be silenced. As Chignole would say, it would give the squadron a jolt, —and at the thought of the figure the latter was certainly cutting at the present moment, he laughed aloud, just as the enemy fired his first shell. His squad was coming back, its task ended, and he darted toward the planes, wove his way among them, exchanged salutes with several, and then guided by

the pond of Lindre, shining on his right under the last rays of the sun, he easily made out his goal.

He had to double, as two Huns were pursuing him. But when they shot, he dived as if he were struck and were falling; and he pretended so well that they let him go down quietly, and he found himself just over the aërodrome. The hangars were visible despite their camouflage; in front, some monoplanes marked with black crosses were going out. He turned half way round, released the bombs, straightened up, veered, and fled toward the frontier.

For a moment, the Boches were perplexed by this unexpected manœuvre; then enraged at being tricked, they hurled themselves in his wake. But luckily for Papa Charles, at that moment the Farmans, flanked by the Nieuports, found the range for the batteries, so the Boches preferred not to give battle, but to let the Voisin continue unmolested on its way.

"That's done!"

But just then four shells encircled him and he felt a lively heat at his back. A shot had cut through a tube of the radiator, and the boiling water was spouting through the crack. This shower bath did not disturb him much, but if the radiator ran dry, the engine could not be cooled; it would stick, and there would be a breakdown. So he let go the joy-stick, and stopped the flow by twisting the pipe with a pair of pliers. But when he took hold of the steering gear again to bring his biplane back into the right road and avoid collisions, he was horror struck at the new situation confronting him. The controls of the joy-stick would not move. He leaned over. The cables of the elevator were broken and hung down brushing the screw. He closed the inlet to prevent the propeller from coming in contact with them and smashing, and he tried to reëstablish his equilibrium with the help of the rudder-bar. But the machine tipped violently on its nose and began to spin round on the end of the cockpit.

It was the tail-spin.

He felt as if he were attached to a giant gimlet, hung in space, which increased its speed with every twist. Head down, clinging with all his might so as not to be pitched out of his seat, he shut his eyes to avoid the dizziness which he felt when he saw the ground apparently pitching round him in a spiral. He had one brief gleam of hope, when the machine slid and came back to level. He opened his eyes: eight hundred metres. Saved? No. He dived again, and again the tail-spin began.

This was the end. Whatever happened, he was done for. There was no longer height enough even for an improbable flattening out.

The end. The two words hammered frightfully in his ears which were whistling under the rapid change of atmospheric pressure. The end. Nothing to do about it. He was the victim of forces subdued but not yet enslaved.

But he would not die smashed under the weight of his biplane. He undid his belt,

opened his arms, and with a great cry flung himself to meet that cruel earth which seemed to rush up toward him in order to devour him more quickly.

III. A LETTER

Escadrille, V.B.

In every squadron there is a metal coffer kept with the greatest care in the office of the quartermaster, who has the key. In it are placed, by every pilot and observer, the letters to be sent in case of accident. To-day, I bring to it this letter, destined for you, my very dear. It will be in good company. Mothers, wives, betrothed, mistresses, sisters, god-mothers; these are its companions. Love, passion, broken hearts, hidden longings, unsatisfied caresses, faded flowers, last wishes, everything that endears, everything that stirs to remembrance; the sentimental hodge-podge of twenty young men is locked up in this steel box.

It is no vague presentiment which leads me to write you, but the cool scrutiny of my situation, which convinces me that my doom will soon be upon me.

Yes; the idler, the jester, the dilettante, the truly Parisian comrade that was I, in times of peace, ought logically to disappear in this torment, and I ask your scatter-brain to follow my argument for a few moments.

I left for the front without enthusiasm, in those

flower-decked trains, chalked over with notices announcing Berlin as the first stop. I didn't believe it. I recognized too well the German's strong grip upon our vitals; the slow disintegration of our Republic, promoted by the depravity of our politicians; the degrading softness into which we had been led by the doctrine of peace at any price.

At the overthrow of Belgium, I said: "It was bound to happen!" And when Paris was threatened, I said: "It is fate."

The Marne surprised me. Without attributing it to the intervention of Sainte-Geneviève, I did for a moment recognize something akin to miracle in it—a rebirth, an awakening. But my pessimism got the upper hand again: "It is a stroke of luck," I thought; and I went down into the trenches quite without hope.

Then the surprises began. I found that I had really been aware of nothing. The "knowing gentleman," saturated with morbid egoism and excessive individualism, was an ignoramus who had judged the world from the sofa in his lounging room.

The wretched infantry revealed life to me under its brutal but simple aspect, stripped of the subtleties and complexities with which we snobs try to trim it up. At last I understood the worth of realities, the beauty of action, daily duty, sacrifice for others, for the unknown; I, who had always bounded everything by my own small personality. Now, dependent upon myself alone, I blessed discipline and accepted the uncompromising militarism of a Psichari.

This change did not take place without a struggle, without hard knocks. The past called to me; I felt the lure of the cloudy reveries of former days; I breathed the perfume of old letters; I suffered when I saw my dear ones unchanged, while I was so radically transformed.

Then, aviation cast its spell upon me. My feelings when I made my first flight as a pilot were like those I had felt at my first communion: the same faith, the same mystical confidence; I gave myself to my wings as I had given myself to God.

Joys, robust, almost savage, healthy emotions, brotherly fellowship, heroic nonsense; these were what I found as I followed my profession of bird-man.

When Karlsruhe, which I had gone out to bomb, appeared in the pane of glass on the floor of my cockpit, my happiness reached its height. That day I avenged the insult of 1870 and of 1914 in my own name and the name of my ancestors. I blotted out Sedan and Charleroi. I was no longer conquered, nor the son of the conquered.

Even physically, the war has changed me. Shall I prove it? Do you remember that breakfast we had together in a restaurant near the Madeleine, during my last leave? A gentleman who was sucking the claws of his broiled lobster said to his companion, indicating me: "Look, what a splendid military type——"

A military type!—the ex-dude of Maxim's, whom the Americans regarded with awe because of his pecu-

liar manner of guzzling champagne! A military type—the frequenter of green-rooms, grill-rooms, suspicious houses, race tracks, and also of second-rate shows, beer gardens, and holidays at Neuilly; high life after the manner of Jean Lorrain! A military type!—the lover of the little light-of-love who had been the mistress of old Machin!

So, you see, my redemption was complete. Why, then, since I have improved so much, now that I have learned how to live better, now that I have redeemed my faults, paid my debts, got a steady head on the wing—why wish for death?

Because, in spite of everything, I have not wholly shuffled off the old man, and I have no confidence in the future. I am weak, and I am afraid to go back to those hours of the past: monotonous, idle, lulled by such phrases as "It will come out all right"; "It's of no consequence"—which Chignole translates so well by his: "What's the odds, so long as we're jolly?"

Just now, I am so far away from our petty interests, our narrow sordidness, our childish vanities, our poor little sentimental quarrels, our daily renewal of our vows, that I feel an instinctive disgust, an irresistible repulsion, at the thought of once more hampering myself with all that folly.

Yes, I am afraid of the future. I hear the dull rumbling of the poorer classes against a social organization which is going to pieces, and which the war has discredited; I foresee acute struggles between capital and labour, the hatred of the peasant, who has done

the fighting, for the workman who has made the shells.

Peace is not an end, it is an attitude. Dark years must intervene before order can be established.

How should I employ them? Badly, probably. In any event, less well than at present. Besides, I would rather go out beautifully, in the best act of the play, a modest supernumerary in the splendid adventure, in the red and gold apotheosis of blood and of the sun.

Granted that all that is a pose; it has only the value of a gesture, but doesn't the crowd follow a gesture better than an idea?

The graduate of Saint-Cyr who charged in white gloves and with plumes in his cap was a fool, doubtless; but such fools are needed to set reasonable folk on fire.

Navarre, giving his exhibitions over the trenches, heaped up for himself the hatred of the aviation functionaries who go up prudently once in six months to secure their indemnity from flying; but he remains, nevertheless, the father of aërial tactics of pursuit.

Don't think for a minute that I consider myself a hero and that my conduct requires courage. No. The only time when my courage failed me a little was on my last visit to Paris. Ah, the rear!—Never go back behind the lines, it is too hard to return afterwards. The inventors of "leave" were paltry psychologists, or lusty fellows who could take it easily.

For, after all, even when denuded of great experiences, this life is still to be desired. This life! It is: your bright eyes, your long curled lashes, your wheed-

ling hands; our endless automobile escapades, our feverish evenings at La Napoule, our quiet mornings at Saint-Gervais.

I must not turn over those happy pages, they would move me too much; and for a gentleman who affects the stoic, that would be really too comical.

What sonorous phrases are these! How serious, how weighty, for the frivolous little person that you are, and that you will always be. For, my dear, you will never change; your charm lies in your tranquil inconsequence.

You will forgive me when you remember that this evening, if I am grumbling, it is because I am afraid that you are deceiving me; that if I see everything black, it is because you see everything rose-colour.

Above all, don't regret me. To guard against regret, think how my body, which you have loved, will be mutilated in the final crash, and the horror of the picture will drive the repulsive corpse forever from your thoughts.

Adieu. I adore you.

PAPA CHARLES.

II. EVERY ONE TO HIS TASTE

"Where's your mother?"

M. Bassinet entered the porter's lodge after having wiped his large boots on the door-mat in the passage.

"You're home early, Papa," replied Sophie, who was watering the pot of pansies in the window, with a thousand precautions.

"Lolotte was tired; me, too. Since morning we've whisked from Dauphiné to Vincennes, and from Montpernasse[1] to Montmertre[2]—We've neither of us stopped a minute. Ah! is it fried potatoes you're cooking, Mama Chignole? If it's not too much trouble, cut them very thin; they're crisper that way. Well!—Where's your mother?"

"Mama Chignole" kept her eyes lowered upon the potatoes, while Sophie hid the red in her cheeks by leaning outdoors.

"Gadding about the neighbourhood! If I had known it, I should not have hurried myself. Ah, these women! Their tongues! —their tongues!"

He was launched upon his great monologue on feminine garrulity, its causes and effects, when Madame Bassinet came in like a whirl-

[1] *Prononciation* Bassinet.
[2] *Ibid.*

wind, but stood transfixed at sight of her husband, whose presence she had not suspected.

"Here already?"

"Yes. But what does that mean?" His large forefinger pointed at her elaborate costume.

Madame Bassinet had not worn a wedding ring thirty years not to know that the way to prove yourself in the right is to bluster:

"Yes; I am dressed up to-day! And what of it? Haven't I the right! Must I always be looking like a scrub-woman?"

She awaited the good smack which would permit her to close the incident in tears, but M. Bassinet was content to ask very gently:

"Where have you been?"

She threw her umbrella and handbag on the table, took off her bonnet, and thrust the pins into it as if she were stabbing the stronger sex.

"You might as well know. I have been to see Vermillon."

"Has anything happened to our Chignole?"

"That's not what I went for. You remember, Chignole was apprenticed to a bicycle manufacturer? Well—the man has made money off the war. He's working now on airplanes and he has called Chignole back to his factory. I flew up there; Vermillon waggled his thumb, and the release from military duty was despatched!"

"Vermillon is no longer minister."

"That doesn't make him any less powerful. In eight days your son-in-law once more a civilian—do you understand that?—a civilian —will be taking his cocktail with you."

Sophie kissed her mother. "Mama Chignole's" eyes lighted up with unspeakable joy. M. Bassinet chewed the ends of his moustache.

"You seem annoyed! What are you shaking your head about?"

"No—but——"

"But what? I know what's the matter with you—stupid! You're afraid they'll

call him a slacker! Slacker?—who would dare? Hasn't he done his duty, that boy, and more? Infantry, aviation, wounded, medal! If everybody had done as well as he, we'd be in Berlin by now. Ah! And if you don't approve, who cares—— Go take his place, then!"

M. Bassinet submitted to the insult, shrugged his shoulders, and said with a wry smile: "I beg your pardon, Ma'me Bassinet. It is true, I have nothing to say. I am no longer good for anything."

Whereupon, Madame Bassinet was seized with remorse. Realizing that she had gone a little too far, she went to him and laid her head upon his breast:

"Give me a big blowing up. But yes, my poor old dear, you are still fit to be a grandfather."

* * * * * * *

"Chignole and Frangipane; the Cap'n is asking for you."

They left the mess, where they had been

smoking as they watched the rainstorm, and went to the Captain's office.

He invited them to sit down on the petrol case which served as a sofa. Then, vainly trying to soften his harsh voice:

"I wanted to tell you first, before the news spread, that your friend—that our friend—has been killed within the German lines. Headquarters has sent me last night's German wireless. They announce a bombing plane brought down by their guns in exactly the region where our artillery observers saw Papa Charles go down. The pilot was killed. There's no doubt about it." He rammed his pipe to keep his countenance. Chignole and Frangipane said nothing, and the silence was filled with the noise of the rain on the roof.

"There's no need to say anything. You understand me. The Country—The Flag—For France—I've said the words twenty times over the tomb or to the memory of all those children who were given into my care, and whom Fate has taken from me. But I would like you to know how much I regret

them. They have died of their own free will, as an example; to show their comrades by their heroic suicides what a Frenchman will do. War, like religion, has its martyrs. These are they.

"I sent for you also to say good-bye to you, or rather to receive your farewells. Yes; you are to leave me. I have received two messages concerning you. One releases Chignole from military service and sends him into a factory; the other sends Frangipane to the School at Pau, to learn to be a pilot."

Their eyes went instinctively to the map on the wall, where the bombarded objectives are marked with a red circle, then to the pennant of the squadron, adorned with the *fourragère.* They were on the point of breaking down, but they stiffened and saluted.

The Captain held out his hand: "*Au revoir,* Frangipane—come back to us soon. There will always be a place for you here. *Adieu,* Chignole."

The door slammed. The two friends were gone. The Captain stood musing, his mind

fixed on the vision of all this youth mowed down before its time. Then, shaking off his sad mood, he called through the telephone in a dry, monotonous voice: "Six machines ready for three o'clock—one hundred litres of petrol, twelve bombs."

At mess—where, through an indiscretion of the secretary, the two transfers were already known—bottles of champagne were stripped of their straw and the Head of the Mess had taxed his wits to arrange the bill of fare for a farewell breakfast, rather a heavy one.

* * * * * * *

In the train they seemed to take a lively interest in the landscape, but in reality each was following his own thoughts.

For Frangipane, this was the supreme reward: he was to be a pilot, his own master, the brain of the machine, the tamer of the beast; he was to take the responsibilities, no longer to be a piece of luggage. Nevertheless, a great sadness filled his heart. Only a few months ago they had come to the front,

four friends, so congenial, so closely identified, that they were like one man. Death had taken two, and would life spare the third?

Since the news of his return to the rear, Chignole had been an enigma. At the breakfast he had spoken only when he was obliged to, and now, sunk in his corner, he pretended to watch the smoke of the engine as it floated alongside the train.

Frangipane wanted to be certain, though certainty might mean pain.

"Chignole, I have a proposal to make. To-morrow I shall go to the department, and I'm not boasting when I say that at my suggestion they will give you an appointment as pilot-pupil. Should you like that?"

The eager, enthusiastic, noisy Chignole was now quiet, reasonable, cool: "I should like it—if you think it possible."

His eyes gave the lie to his lips. Frangipane took pity on him and did not prolong his torment:

"After all—— Well, go back to the factory—as they've asked for you."

Chignole felt keenly the mute reproach in what this last one of his old friends had left unsaid. He wished that he had sufficient control of himself to cry out: "Well, yes; I'll go with you; I'll break my neck—or be an ace!"

But no, he couldn't. He no longer had his nerves under good control. He had seen too many of his companions die. The deaths of Flagada and Papa Charles, coming so close, one upon the other, had shocked him, depressed him, overwhelmed him. Was he to be condemned without excuse? Since chance put off the fatal moment, should he not take advantage of it? Life was offered him, and was he to reject it? There was Sophie, his wife, his very soul and his own flesh, awaiting him at the end of the journey. There was love, family life, the future; there was workaday Paris and the Paris of holidays; there was money to buy happiness; finally, there was his mother whose old age he could smooth. Should he refuse Paradise, now that the way back to it was made easy? It was not as if he had asked

this favour. It had been offered him, and he would take it. He was not a saint; he was a man who wanted to live. War had educated him, had opened up to him horizons hitherto invisible. Now, he knew joys in which he longed to share; and why should he not, indeed, since he had already done all his duty?

Still, Frangipane, too, had done his duty; yet, instead of going back to the rear, to safety, he was deliberately turning his face to new dangers.

If Papa Charles had been there, with his unwearying kindness, his contagious vitality, he would very soon have convinced Chignole, who changed his mind at a word; he would have given him back his faith in himself. But Frangipane, with his unresponsive face, his elusive manner, seemed to him already hostile.

Paris.—They separated with a foolish excuse, and said good-bye feeling that they should never see each other again. They were already strangers.

V. CHIGNOLE GETS FAT

It was the end of November, and seven o'clock in the evening. Chignole came up out of the station of the "Métro Blanche," and went toward the Rue Lepic. He turned up his collar, for the rain was fine, invisible, but penetrating.

Yellow gleams from the shops streaked the sticky asphalt and lighted the pushcarts standing at the edge of the sidewalk with their wheels in the refuse of the gutter. The houses exhaled a stale damp smell that mingled with the city's stench, for the wind was bringing the reeks from Aubervilliers. Housewives, with shopping bags in their hands, hurried to the street hawkers' baskets, and chatted and made jokes under their bumping, mixed-up umbrellas. Little women, unwashed but painted, with dogs tucked under their arms, went down toward the bar-rooms of the Boulevard de Clichy, stumbling along on their absurdly high heels. Sewing girls, going back up the hill to Mont-

martre, were buying pork sausage and vegetables "ready cooked" for their dinner.

Chignole, crossing the street to make a short cut, saw someone approaching who looked like him. It was merely his image reflected in the glass of a shop window. He stopped to look at himself, but the examination did not satisfy him, for he sighed.

Here was no longer the elegant silhouette of the aviator, with his English jacket, his laced boots, his shoulder-belt, and the jewels of his decorations. This was the image of an ordinary, everyday civilian like anybody else. Only the boutonnière, with its edge of coloured ribbons, recalled a glorious past.

In this street where once men and women had turned to look at him as he passed, the best he could expect now was not to be jostled. In the military uniform he had been any one's equal; now he had become once more the workman with hands soiled by work, with broken nails—he who, in the escadrille, had polished his nails, like Flagada.

He suffered from the promiscuousness of the factory. Where were the witty retorts of Papa Charles—the conversations at mess which had meant so much to him? Where were those unforgettable days of aërial warfare; the raid on Germany, the battle in the sky, the anguish over encompassing danger, the fighting against elements and men unchained; the triumphant returns, and the wedding procession across Nancy, winked at by benevolent authority?

He had nothing to complain of: his work on the motors interested him; he was earning high wages; he was prolonging his honeymoon with Sophie, to the delight of the old mothers. Still, he was not happy. He did not breathe easily here at the rear, where everything, even himself, seemed too narrow. The outlook of his wife, his mother, the Bassinets, was not his own. He had to force himself, to bore himself, to keep in tune with them.

Once, he had gone into a bar where he knew he should meet comrades on leave:

"How fat you're getting!" they had said

to him, meaning it as a compliment. But he never went back.

He bought the *Liberté* which a ragged boy was hawking in the corner of a doorway, and he ran through the bulletin mechanically, under a gas jet. His eyes went to the news of the war in the air: "Adjutant de la Guérynière has brought down his fifth airplane."

"La Guérynière—La Guérynière"—he stammered.—"Why, that's Frangipane!" A flush of pride mounted to his face, but at the same time he was stirred by painful agitation:

"That's what *I* might have been—an ace. I, too, might have been cited in the bulletin. My name might have been in the newspapers—in history. My photograph on the covers of the illustrated magazines. But—I needed Papa Charles; by myself, I hadn't the sand."

It is easy to see what we might do, but we make so many things our excuse for clinging to life; a thousand little rootlets issuing from our hearts tie us to earth and prevent our flight.

At the corner of the Rue Durantin he

heard himself hailed by M. Fondu who was also returning to the bosom of the family. M. Fondu was a changed man. All of a sudden he had felt warlike appetites arise in him. At the City Hall he was now nicknamed, "the General," and privately he was flattered. He could not go to the front, but his combative instincts overflowed into numerous extraordinary memorials which he addressed to competent ministers, "To be used where they will do the most good."

"My boy, I have just put the last touch to a report on aviation. I've been looking a long time for a title. You know the title is everything. But I've found it. 'How To Make Her Hum!' What do you think of it?"

The ramblings of "the General," which Chignole was careful not to interrupt, led them to the Rue des Saules. M. Bassinet, on the doorstep, beckoned them to hasten their steps: "Hurry up! Come on! We want time to sip our lemon and gentian cocktail quietly before we sit down to the table."

The first thing which struck Chignole as he entered the lodge was his picture as a soldier, "an enlargement very highly finished and resembling him exactly," according to his father-in-law. The soldier in the frame seemed to mock the civilian. He was genuinely unhappy and it was with an absent-minded "good evening" that he replied to his family's noisy demonstrations of affection.

"A penny for your thoughts, Chignole——"

"Oh, not Chignole—Arthur; Chignole's a back number. Chignole—that's over and done with."

Tired out, he went to the window and leaned his head heavily against the cold pane of glass.

The women were troubled, but M. Bassinet quieted them:

"Pshaw! A cloud which will vanish—when he knows about the surprise," and with a wink, "Go to it, Ma'me Bassinet."

Madame Bassinet hesitated coyly, but her husband, assuming a little of his forgotten authority, insisted:

"Go to it, Ma'me Bassinet. Go ahead!—Out with it! It's high time to tell him."

Madame Bassinet wiped her eyes with a duster which she carried; "Mama Chignole" was knitting baby socks harder than ever; M. Bassinet murmured a broad joke to M. Fondu, who had abandoned his grandiose dreams for the moment. Sophie lowered her eyes.

Chignole started up! Father? He was to be a father! A child! His name, his blood perpetuated. The future which had escaped him hitherto belonged to him now. His mortifications, his regrets, his deceptions, his fears, were to melt away beneath the white curtains of a cradle.

"If it's a girl," clamoured M. Bassinet, "we'll call her Victoria. And if it's a boy? —well, what shall we name it if it's a boy?"

Then in the silence caused by the general emotion "Mama Chignole's" voice arose very clear:

"If it's a boy, we'll call it Papa Charles."

THE END

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